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ADELA



ADELA  
A JERSEY ROMANCE

BY  
C. M. HAWKSFORD

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

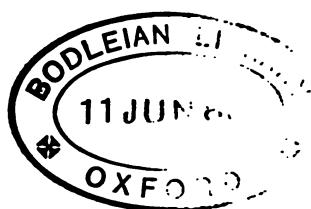
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# ESTHER.

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## CHAPTER I.

**I**T so happened that it was an unusually fine, dry summer. Every evening Mrs. Cumberland, Angus, and Esther were able to sit out under the chestnut tree, and have their coffee there, often remaining so late that Pauline had to call her mistress in. Esther always chose a low seat by her mother's side, and Angus so placed himself that he could watch her. Generally, when it began to get dusk, Esther sang to them. She had the use of no piano except when she was at the convent, for Mrs. Cumberland had never been able to afford one, but she sang quite as readily without, bits from Mozart and Beethoven, old Norman lullaby songs, and gay little chansonnettes. She had

a sweet, fresh young voice, and it seemed to Angus as he listened that no music but Esther's had ever before touched his soul.

Long years after, he was one day walking in a crowded London thoroughfare, when a French organ-boy struck up one of those once familiar airs. What a tide of memories a few bars conjured up! An almost forgotten scene rose before him. The quaint little garden at Villedieu, the spreading chestnut, and Esther on the low seat, her white figure distinctly outlined in the fading light.

His heart tightened with a sudden throb of pain. He flung the boy half-a-crown, and, drawing his hat over his eyes, turned quickly down another street.

Though the days that are gone may never return, their ghost will sometimes rise and haunt us.

A fortnight had elapsed since Angus first came to Villedieu, and the subject of his leaving was never mentioned. As a matter

of course, he walked to the cottage every morning, and generally Esther was waiting for him. Sometimes leaning out of the window, her golden head crowned by the clustering vine leaves, sometimes gathering bouquets from the mignonette and sweet peas which grew together in tangled profusion just inside the little iron railings, but always just where she could command a good view of the long, broad road leading down to Villedieu.

She wore a white dress every day now. That was Pauline's doing ; but a new depth of expression had come into her blue eyes, a touch of conscious womanhood in her manner, leading her away from the borderland of childhood ; an almost imperceptible change, but one that seemed to make her grow more fair and more winning.

Mrs. Cumberland, lying on her sofa, would watch Angus, with his tall, manly figure, and dark, waving hair, standing

beside her darling, and a contented smile would hover on her lips.

Her faith was strengthened. This surely was to be the realization of her fondest hopes—the answer to her prayers.

Why had she ever doubted and wearied her spirit—why had she not trusted more?

“Mamma,” Esther said, coming in one morning, and interrupting this now constant train of thought, “we have a little plan to propose, Angus and I. We have quite set our hearts on making an expedition to the ruins of St. Bernard’s Well, and we have also quite made up our minds you are to go also.”

“I, Esther! You know that is impossible. Why, it is at least two miles off, and a great part of the way up hill.”

“We have remembered all that, mamma; but Angus is going to get a conveyance, perhaps only a donkey cart; but we can easily fit it up with rugs and cushions,

and drive very slowly; we might have such a lovely day, mamma;" and Esther knelt by her mother's couch, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling.

Mrs. Cumberland was not usually a demonstrative woman; but that morning, in the fulness of her heart, she put her arms round Esther and kissed her.

"My darling," she said, "if you—you and Angus—wish for me, and you can really manage as you say, of course I should like to go."

"If we could only hire a basket pony-carriage," Esther said, reflectively.

Mrs. Cumberland sighed. The Norwood lanes, with Esther once more a little child, and her dead husband, rose before her.

History was repeating itself. Esther and Angus were entering upon the same road she herself had trodden. The days of love, and youth, and hope, which had

perished for her, were just dawning for them.

Pauline was consulted, and gave her approval to the proposed expedition. Like Mrs. Cumberland, she watched Angus' increasing devotion to Esther with great complacency. She admired his dark eyes, his handsome young face; but above all, she was glad the struggle with poverty would be over at last, and the hotel in Paris realized.

The arrangements for the expedition, once put in motion, progressed most satisfactorily. Angus' energy was untiring. The donkey cart was found, a hamper of provisions packed. It fortunately happened that Mrs. Cumberland was, for her, unusually well, so that Esther was radiant with delight.

At about twelve o'clock on the day fixed, the little party were all in readiness. It was a lovely morning, neither too hot nor

too cold, just one of those exhilarating days when, to the strong, the fact of living is a pleasure; a day that ought not to be passed indoors. As Esther had suggested, the little low, long waggon, used ordinarily as a market cart for vegetables, was made to look quite picturesque with rugs and cushions. The donkey, led by a boy wearing a short blue blouse and wooden shoes, had bells round its collar, which tinkled as it walked, and Esther had tied some flowers in the bridle.

They were very merry when they started, and Pauline, her hand shading her eyes, stood watching them from the cottage door till they were out of sight; then she went in, rolled up her sleeves, and was soon immersed in the glories of a long accumulated wash.

Never since she was a child had Esther soiled so many white frocks.

St. Bernard's Well lay on the other side



of the hill leading from Villedieu. When the little party reached the summit, they paused for a rest.

“I had no idea the view from here was so lovely,” Esther exclaimed, enthusiastically. She had seen it a hundred times before that morning, but everything now possessed a strange charm. It would not have signified, perhaps, what the place had been. There are times when all external objects borrow their beauty from the mind, but she did not know this. To Esther, the world’s perfection seemed suddenly revealed in a strange, new way; the sun, the sky, the fields of corn, the wild flowers, all the beautiful parables of nature were beginning to be understood.

Mrs. Cumberland had never been there at all, but she did not see it with Esther’s eyes, though even to her it was a fair enough landscape. Folds of hills, extending away to a far off horizon; a river like a

silver thread, winding through the meadows, bright with rich red clover ; young green corn, and blue flowering flax ; Villedieu, with its quaint old houses lying in the valley below them ; the cathedral spires standing out against a background of deep blue sky.

As they made the ascent of the hill, Angus and Esther had lingered a little behind ; going down, they all kept together. The well was situated in a pine-tree wood. A clearing had been made to reach it ; for, once a year, a faithful few still went to offer up their prayers for renewed health and prosperity at the sacred shrine.

A stone figure, half crumbled away, stood just above the well, which was built in great blocks of granite, and covered with ivy. There was still a little water in the well, but very far down ; and only once a year—on the Festival of St. Bernard—had it, tradition said, any healing power.

The spot was quite deserted now, and not a sound was to be heard.

Mrs. Cumberland was carefully helped out of the waggon, and laid upon her impromptu sofa, the cushions and rugs being arranged so as to form a kind of divan on the grass. The donkey was taken out, and led away by the boy to graze on the rich green herbage below the wood. The hamper was unpacked, and Angus and Esther busied themselves in finding a suitable spot to dine, and in laying the cloth.

It was a very simple spread, only a bit of cold meat, some cream cheese, salad and fruit, but how delicious everything tasted !

"I shall never be happy," Esther said, presently, when the dinner was over, "unless we manage to get some water from the well ; I have set my heart on it." So she and Angus went to the side, and, leaning over, lowered a pitcher, held by long rope reins.

Mrs. Cumberland, lying on her cushions, watched them, and listened to their joyous laughter, her mind absorbed in her own past and Esther's future.

When, at last, after many failures, they succeeded in getting a little water into the pitcher, Esther ran for a glass.

"You must wish as you drink it," she said, offering the tumbler to Angus; "and if you desire anything very much whilst you are drinking, your wish will be granted."

"Do you know what I desire most, Esther?" Angus replied, in a low voice, as he raised the water to his lips. His eyes were bent on Esther, and they spoke his love as eloquently as speech.

A lovely carmine flush came into Esther's face, but she only lowered her eyes.

"You must wish also," Angus said, "and he passed the glass into Esther's trembling hands.

Esther put her lips to it also. "I have wished," she said, hurriedly, and she ran back to her mother.

They did not hasten home. Mrs. Cumberland had brought a book, which she read, or pretended to read, and Angus and Esther strolled about and gathered wild flowers. They enjoyed themselves as children do. They made a wreath, and crowned the broken figure of St. Bernard with it; a wreath that hung there for months, in the rain, and in the wind, and under the scorching sun, till it was withered, dried up, and dead.

They had, those happy lovers, a hundred things to say as they wandered about the moss-grown paths. And yet, sometimes unconsciously, they walked in silence, sweet silence, that said so much more than words.

"Why will the day go so quickly?" Esther said, sadly, when the sun began

to sink into the western horizon, and a waft of chilly air warned her it was time her mother should go home.

They had made a second meal of the fragments. The donkey was once more harnessed to the little cart, and yet they lingered.

"We shall come again, mother dear, shan't we?" Esther said, caressingly.

It had been a day marked by a white stone. They all thought it was only the first of many others like it that were to follow, not that it was to be the last.



## CHAPTER II.

**T**HE morning following the expedition to the Wishing Well, Angus presented himself at the cottage with an unusual cloud on his face.

“What has happened?” Mrs. Cumberland enquired, anxiously. She was already beginning to feel that Angus was like a son to her.

“I have my marching orders,” Angus replied, shortly. “I must leave here to-morrow morning.”

Mrs. Cumberland turned white. Her beautiful structure was already crumbling into dust.

Angus could not see Esther’s face, for she had averted it.

For a few moments no one spoke.

"It seems," Angus continued, at last, "that my friend, Thurlowe, not hearing from me, feared something might have happened, and wrote to my father. My father has written to me, desiring that I continue my travels without an hour's delay. At present I am dependent on my father for everything. He suggested a foreign tour as being desirable before I settled to work, and I feel bound to carry out his wishes."

"And your friend, then, is still in Paris?"

"Yes. Thurlowe, it appears, has been patiently waiting for me all this time. I suppose I ought to have written. I intended doing so. Now I have no alternative but to go."

That was a very sad day at the cottage: a sort of reaction from the brightness of the one before. Mrs. Cumberland was *dreadfully* depressed; Esther very quiet. Pauline alone was hopeful.



“He would speak before he went,” she was positive. “At all events, Monsieur would say *something* to Madame,” she decided, as she prepared a last dainty little dinner. “He might go, but he would return,” and she smiled bravely as she moved about among the dishes and the saucepans. All would come right in the end.

But the day waned, and Angus made no sign. In the evening they sat as usual under the chestnut tree, and drank their coffee there ; but Esther did not sing. She felt if she tried there would be tears in her voice.

When Mrs. Cumberland went in, Esther and Angus stayed behind.

“Come and take a stroll with me,” Angus said, and, without a word, Esther got up, and let him take her hand and lay it on his arm. Then, very slowly, they wandered round to the front of the house, passed

through the little iron gate, and went out into the road.

Not a soul was visible. The moon was just rising. The air was heavy with the scent of new-mown hay. It was a sweet, still, summer night, one of those nights that came after a long, sultry day, and breathe of rest—and love.

A hundred times passionate words rose to Angus' lips, a hundred times he forced them back.

In after years how bitterly he repented the keen sense of honour that had kept him silent, that had lost him the one thing his heart had most coveted.

He had never yet concealed anything of consequence from his father. He knew his father, in his ambition for his only son, would prohibit an engagement to Esther. He considered, till he was earning his own livelihood, he was bound to tell his father if he took any important step. That no

secret engagement would be right or honourable ; above all, he feared his father, should he ask him, would forbid his ever thinking of marrying his cousin Esther. He must wait. It would only be a case of patience.

In her little room Mrs. Cumberland was praying that things were coming right, praying for those things which were never to be.

Presently, Esther and Angus went in. They had waited out as long as it was possible. Though the words were unspoken, Angus knew that Esther loved him, and those last minutes were very sweet for all their bitterness.

The clock of the old cathedral chimed the hour of ten.

"I must go," Angus said, with a mournful ring in his voice, and then, for the last time, they went back through the little gate into the open cottage door.

Mrs. Cumberland rose from her sofa, looking wistfully into both their faces.

"It is hard to wish good-bye," Angus said, huskily.

Mrs. Cumberland did not speak.

"In a year or two, at most," he continued, earnestly, "I shall, I hope, be an independent man. Then I shall return. You will not forget me—you will not let Esther forget me?"

"You are the only friend who has come to us in all these years, so we are neither of us likely to forget you," Mrs. Cumberland replied.

"You have been very good to me. I have spent the happiest days I have ever known here in Villedieu. I am obliged to go. I may not even be able to write, but for all that, you will not doubt me. You will wait—Esther will wait for me."

Angus put his arm round Mrs. Cumberland, and kissed her reverently, as though

he were her son. Then he turned to Esther.

“As I am going away, may I kiss my cousin Esther?”

Angus addressed himself to his aunt, but without waiting for permission, he drew Esther to him, holding both her hands, and laid his first and last kiss of love on her sweet, up-turned face.

A moment after, and he was gone.

With a little sob, Esther ran to the window, and leaned out.

In after years, in the struggle of life, when success had come, and those ambitions his father had desired for him were realized, the world's measure of success—which is often but Dead Sea fruit when gathered—when he was a cold, hard, self-contained man of the world, that picture of his lost love would sometimes rise suddenly before Angus Macpherson, the sweet, sad face of a fair young girl, with golden hair, framed by vine-leaves.

### CHAPTER III.

**W**HEN Angus was gone, a kind of gloom settled on the cottage. Pauline was bitterly disappointed; Mrs. Cumberland nervous and fretful; Esther more sad than either of them suspected. Everything that had seemed so bright when Angus was there had, somehow, quite changed. She hated going to Villedieu; the streets looked dull, the Trois Couronnes deserted.

Only the old Cathedral had now the power to interest her. Whilst Pauline was marketing, Esther spent most of her time kneeling at the Lady altar, where she and Angus had once knelt together.

It seemed to bring him nearer, as she

prayed for his safety, his happiness—his return.

The summer and autumn passed away with no particular events to mark them ; then winter came ; a winter exceptionally severe even for France, and it tried Mrs. Cumberland dreadfully.

Increased luxuries to secure warmth and comfort became, in her state of health, actual necessities to sustain life. Old Pauline did what she could to keep down expenses, often eating nothing herself for days together beyond *soupe maigre* and a crust of bread.

The Lady Superior of the Sacré Cœur sometimes sent little offerings of wine, broth, or beef tea ; and once, when Mrs. Cumberland was unusually ill, one of the sisters took turns in the night watching.

Esther tried to keep a cheerful face, for her mother's spirit seemed quite crushed ; but she grew pale and thin, the roundness

of childhood left her face, and a sad expression came into her lovely blue eyes.

She always thought Angus would come or write. Her trust in him was as yet unbroken.

With Mrs. Cumberland it was different. She understood better than Esther the difficulties that would be placed in his way, should he still desire to renew his intimacy with them. Her faith had been terribly shaken; physically and mentally, she had no power to rise.

She was weaker also, and suffered more. She could only sit up for a very short time, and her nights were bad. When the long, dreary winter and spring, with their bitterly cold east winds, had passed away, and another summer had come, Mrs. Cumberland rallied a little; but she never regained her lost ground.

She could not sit out under the chestnut



tree, except very occasionally, and then only for a little while. It was evident to every stranger who looked at her that her strength was failing; the sands of life were almost run out.

One day Esther was standing in the little front garden, when she saw the postman coming. He often went to the Convent; but then he took the lower road. His passing by the cottage was unusual.

Could he be bringing her a letter?

Her heart beat quickly. She had been feeling so sad, so miserable, that she hardly dared to hope.

The man stopped. He held a letter in his hand; for a moment he hesitated; then he handed it to her.

Esther took it without a word. She did not go back into the cottage, but slipped round the house into the garden.

No one but Angus would write to her,

she thought ; and she could not read his letters when any eyes, not even her mother's or Pauline's, were watching her.

The handwriting puzzled her ; it was not familiar ; it was not Angus' after all. With trembling fingers she broke the seal and read :

“ MY DEAR NIECE,—

“ You will wonder, perhaps, at this letter being addressed to you, instead of to your mother ; but when you have read it quietly through, I think, if I am not mistaken, the reason will have explained itself.

“ I have heard, no matter how, that your mother has been, and still is increasingly ill, and I have a proposition to make, subject to certain conditions—which I shall explain further on.

“ I am willing to give you the sum of two hundred pounds to enable you to

leave Villedieu, and take your mother to Munich. There is a physician in Munich, Doctor Müller by name, who especially devotes himself to the treatment of diseases such as that from which your mother is suffering.

“I do not say he can cure her—that is in the hands of Providence only; but a skilled physician has doubtless the power to alleviate suffering, if not to prolong life; and, in any event, I think you would not like to throw away the chance.

“The conditions I impose are only that, when you leave Villedieu, which should be as soon as possible, you give *no one* your new address, nor suggest any clue that could lead to its being found out.

“If you agree to accept my proposition, I should like a letter at once to say so; and on the receipt of it, I will forward you the two hundred pounds, together

with full directions for your future movements.

“Should I not hear, I shall conclude from your silence that my offer is rejected.

“With my kind regards to your mother, together with my best wishes for her recovery,

“I remain, your sincere friend,

“JAMES ANDERSON MACPHERSON.”

Esther held the open letter in her hand long after she finished reading it. The contents were a cruel blow to her.

Not a word, not a line, from Angus; not even a message.

At any other time such an offer for her mother would have seemed almost too good to be true; now her belief in Angus was shaken, and the pain of that thought, for the moment, outweighed all others.

It did not strike her that Angus might never have been told of this offer. It was only evident he had forgotten them ; that he never meant to come back.

Presently she went slowly back into the house, and gave the letter to her mother.

Mrs. Cumberland read it carefully, and as she did so a hectic flush came into her usually pale cheeks.

"We won't go, Esther," she exclaimed, vehemently ; "I will never consent to leave Villedieu."

She saw, more plainly than Esther did, all Mr. Macpherson's letter intended to convey.

His offer was made in the hope of preventing Esther and Angus meeting again, and it was evident this fear had prompted his generosity. He did not want his son to return to Villedieu.

"Of course, we shall go, mamma dear," Esther said, twining her arms gently round her mother's neck.

“Think, if you only get well.”

Tears came into Mrs. Cumberland’s eyes. She knew she would never get well, but she did not say so, only shook her head.

“Imagine, mother, if you were even to get better, how happy my life, all our lives, would be.”

Mrs. Cumberland did not answer, for she could not help allowing there was force in the argument. After all, Angus was young; the young are easily distracted from their purpose.

A year had gone by since he left. He had made no sign. He might not, probably never would, return to Villedieu.

With a little money, with renewed health, whilst living in a big city, she might have opportunities of making some provision for Esther’s future, which it would be hopeless to think of doing in Villedieu.

Pauline was consulted.

She knew, perhaps, better than either Esther or Mrs. Cumberland how impossible it would be to keep the household together for another winter. Her practical nature grasped at a chance of relief from a hundred fears, hitherto hidden deep down in her faithful heart.

It was a liberal offer, unprecedentedly liberal, and had come when most needed. If Angus really cared for mademoiselle, if he meant anything serious, to find them, no matter where they went, would not be difficult; meanwhile, present requirements must be first thought of.

Mrs. Cumberland naturally fell into Pauline's views. She even thought she had been hard on Mr. Macpherson, and might have misjudged him. After a few days of discussion and deliberation the verdict was given.

Esther wrote to her uncle a letter accepting his offer, and waited the reply.

It came by return of post. The money was enclosed, together with the promised instructions. They were to give notice at once to quit the cottage, have their furniture taken at a valuation, pay any bills that might be owing, and proceed to Munich, by the route drawn out.

Arrived in Munich, they would find rooms engaged for them in the Karl Strasse, and Doctor Müller's address would be waiting them there.

Everything was clear, explicit, formal.

They had nothing to do but go.

Fortunately, perhaps, the excitement caused by the prospect of a journey, and the breaking up, for a second time, of home, made Mrs. Cumberland so much worse that all Esther's thoughts were engrossed by anxiety for her health, and she was forced into keeping up at least a semblance of cheerfulness.



She had no time to waste in useless dreams.

She said "Good-bye" to a few chosen friends; principally among the poor cloth weavers, and paid a last visit to the convent of the Sacré Cœur.

"*Ma mère*," Esther said, throwing herself into the arms of the Lady Superior, "I may not tell you where we are going. I may not even give you, or anyone, our new address. This is part of the conditions laid upon us by the friend who is sending us away; but my mother will have a great physician, and you must pray for us."

The Lady Superior kissed her tenderly and blessed her. Little Esther had become very dear to her, and her going away would leave a blank in her heart no one else could fill.

The good sisters crowded round her with kindly tears in their eyes.

They were gentle, tender women, whose simple lives were burdened with no such sorrows as came to Esther.

They gave her little souvenirs—bits of embroidery, pious books, pictures of saints, things of trifling value in themselves, but very precious to Esther, as tokens of their love.

And then they also said good-bye.

It was one morning, early in July, when Mrs. Cumberland, Esther and Pauline left the cottage. A carriage from the Trois Couronnes took them down to meet the *diligence*, and the last familiar face they saw was Madame Delepine's, as she stood on the doorstep waving an adieu.

“*La pauvre petite*,” she said, to Marie, and there was a world of meaning in her sigh as she turned into the cheerful salon, and began to busy herself with preparations for the eleven o'clock table-d'hôte breakfast.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE journey to Munich, partly by rail, and partly by *diligence*, was not accomplished without a great deal of suffering on Mrs. Cumberland's part. She was physically quite unequal to bear the prolonged fatigue, and only was prevented from breaking down by intense excitement.

They stayed a night in Paris, a night at Chalons; another at Strasbourg.

Mr. Macpherson had enclosed directions for this route when he had sent the two hundred pounds in circular notes. He had even named the best and quietest hotels, so that a great many of their difficulties were smoothed away.

A week after leaving Villedieu they reached Munich.

The rooms Mr. Macpherson had engaged for them were in the Karl Strasse, and there they found waiting them a note of introduction to Dr. Müller, the celebrated physician who was, Esther fondly imagined, to cure her mother.

Mrs. Cumberland did not speak a word of German, neither did Pauline, and the little of the language she had learnt at the Convent was only useful for very ordinary conversation.

Fortunately Dr. Müller spoke English. He was called in to see Mrs. Cumberland the day after her arrival, and saw, at a glance, that hers was a case beyond human skill.

He did not say this, but he suggested no active treatment, which to those who were experienced in illness, would have told more surely than anything else what his real opinion was.

Now that Mrs. Cumberland had left Villedieu, and knew that to return was

impossible, she began to regret she had ever been persuaded into taking a step that was irretrievable. The rooms in the Karl Strasse were very poorly furnished. They had been obliged, before leaving the cottage, to part with many little comforts, which, though valueless in themselves, had become endeared by long years of association, and Mrs. Cumberland missed them painfully. It had been impossible to carry away anything but necessities; still, now they were lost, the value of a few trifling ornaments seemed to have increased tenfold. She did not like German life, or German ways. Villedieu rose perpetually before her, painted in all its brightest colours. When in Villedieu her one regret had been that she would never be able to return to England; now the cottage seemed the home she clung to most.

Mr. Macpherson's kindness in giving her

the means, and so enabling her to consult a first-rate physician, faded away as the truth dawned upon her mind that his real reason had never been any actual interest in herself, but only a desire to separate Angus from Esther. She had always suspected this, but it did not become a settled conviction till she had been some time in Munich.

If Dr. Müller had held out hopes that she might be cured, she would have believed Mr. Macpherson was her earthly salvation ; but if she were to die all the same, if her life were not even prolonged, sending her once more into exile was simply an injury, an act of cruelty.

She had fancied in a big city some advantages might be gained for Esther ; but she had only been there a few weeks when she recognised in their loneliness and utter friendliness how fallacious this hope would prove.

She lay all day on a sofa in the big, bare

sitting-room, feeling like a caged bird. Old Pauline was the recipient of her murmurings, and tried what she could do to throw a cheerful light over what was, ever to her, a very grey landscape.

Pauline helped the German servant with her work ; but, for a greater part of the day, she sat by her mistress, dressed in her best dress and cap, with a bit of work in her hand. She was quite out of her element. She missed the active, busy life she had been leading in her own country. The strange ways of a strange city depressed her, though, for her mistress' sake, she bore a brave front

Esther was still hopeful. She had that blind faith in the power of a great physician which the young only possess.

Her mother had been sent to Munich to be made well. After she was rested, when the bad effects of the journey had quite worn off, when Dr. Müller had seen

her a few more times, then her recovery would begin.

Mrs. Cumberland would not allow Esther to shut herself up; so on her best days, when Pauline could be spared, they walked out together. Sometimes they wandered beyond the ramparts, far out into the suburbs; but more often they strolled about the gardens and the grand courts of the old palace, admiring its Doric portals, its noble, bronze figures and lovely fountains; or they spent the afternoon in the magnificent rooms and galleries of the Königsbau, among lovely fresco paintings and exquisite sculpture.

Esther had never seen anything before, and the luxury of art in Munich bewildered her. If she had been able to study her new world with a sympathetic guide, nothing would have been wanting. As it was, old Pauline was not a very intelligent, and certainly not an enthusiastic



companion. Painted friezes representing the history of Orpheus, Carnova's Paris, or Thorwaldsen's Adonis, were not half as interesting to her as a day's marketing in Villedieu would have been.

If Angus had only been there, Esther whispered to herself. He had surely been there last year. He had seen the same things she was now gazing at; and this fancy threw a sort of halo over everything.

Weeks went by, which were dreary enough. Occasionally, but very rarely, Mrs. Cumberland took a short drive.

She was always speculating now upon how long the two hundred pounds would last. The lodgings, compared to the rent in Villedieu, were expensive. Dr. Müller, each time he called, ordered things that involved a certain amount of outlay, and the capital was rapidly diminishing.

At last Esther began to grow alarmed

about her mother, for it seemed to her she made no progress towards the expected recovery, and, if anything, she was weaker, and more faded than when they left France.

She reflected about it for some time; then she made up her mind to see Doctor Müller alone, and ask him his real opinion.

She waited for him, one day, on the landing below their rooms.

“May I speak to you?” she said, timidly, as he came down the stairs.

He was a pleasant, picturesque-looking old man, with keen, penetrating eyes of dark steel-grey, and long, white hair, combed back from a wide, high forehead, and falling over his black velvet collar.

“What is the matter?” he asked, with a kindly smile.

“I wanted to ask you,” she said, “if you would mind telling me how long it will be before mamma is better?”

A grave expression came over the old physician's face.

"My child," he replied, after a moment's hesitation, "perhaps it is better you should know the truth now, for you will have to know it one day. - Your mother will never be better in this world."

Esther clasped her hands tightly together.

"Do you mean she is dying?" she said, with a little sharp cry of pain.

"I think her life is only a question of time, which I have no power to lengthen. We must remember life and death are in God's hands alone. We all go when our time comes."

Esther did not say another word. Doctor Müller tried to detain her, for he had a kindly, sympathetic heart; but she flew past him, and shut herself in her own room.

An hour passed, one of those dark hours

that come, some time or another, in most people's lives. Then she fancied she heard Pauline calling her.

She could not see her mother ; she could not, she knew, command herself sufficiently to speak without betraying what she felt. At Villedieu, in time of trouble, she had always found consolation in the cathedral. She could not walk alone to the Munich cathedral, it was too far off. But the beautiful Royal Chapel was close by ; she would like to go there, she thought, and be for a little while alone with God and her sorrow.



## CHAPTER V.

**M**R. BARRINGTON was in Munich. He had come there from Dresden, and intended leaving the night before ; but one of those accidents people call chance detained him.

His valet had sprained his ankle. At first his master thought of continuing his journey, and leaving him to follow ; but as the doctor assured him a day's rest was all that he required, he decided to remain. He knew Munich well, as he did most of the capitals of Europe ; but the place always interested him.

He arranged to go to the opera in the evening. The manager was bringing out, in "Lucia di Lammermoor," a young girl he had known in Paris, and in whom he

was rather interested. He met an artist, whom he also knew, and promised during the afternoon to look in at the Pinakothek, and give his opinion on a copy he was making of one of Albert Dürer's pictures.

Then, to while away the intervening time, he went into the Chapel Royal.

Mr. Barrington had arrived at that age when art, enjoyed in its greater perfection, comes in a measure to fill up the gap left empty by the want of home ties. His knowledge and experience were large, his judgment critically severe, his tastes refined.

He sauntered leisurely down the aisle, examining the marble columns, the coloured mosaics of the parapets, the gorgeous fresco paintings on their gold ground, and finally paused in front of the principal altar.

There, under the coloured figures of the Redeemer and the Deity, the softened light of the beautiful stained glass window

falling on his upturned face, Esther was kneeling.

Mr. Barrington started. Never before had he seen such a combination of youth, beauty, and sorrow.

Esther was not aware anyone was watching her. Her hands were folded on her breast, tears were in her eyes, and a prayer for resignation on her parted lips.

Presently she got up and moved quietly away.

Mr. Barrington followed. It was almost an involuntary act, upon which he did not wait to reason; something impelled him to do it.

Outside the church an August sun was shining, the light almost blinding in its brightness after the subdued gloom of the church; but Esther did not linger a moment. She walked on quickly till she came to the Karl Strasse.

Mr. Barrington managed to keep her in view without letting it appear he was doing so, and finally was rewarded by seeing her go into her house and close the door.

When Mr. Barrington had decided she lived in that street, he turned away and retraced his steps. It was only an absurd fancy, he argued. He had admired hundreds of beautiful women before at first sight, and forgotten their existence half-an-hour afterwards.

He called a carriage, drove to the Pinakothek, and idled away the rest of the afternoon in the sculpture and painting galleries. In the evening he went to the opera, and saw his little *protégée* make her *début* as the bride in Lucia.

The house was crowded, the scene brilliant. When the curtain fell, the *débutante* was led before the foot-lights, whilst bouquets were showered at her feet.



How was it that everywhere the sorrowful face of the girl he had seen kneeling at the altar in the Royal Chapel seemed to come between him and everything he looked at, the delicate profile thrown into relief by a gorgeous setting of frescoes on burnished gold.

The fancy was too absurd, and Mr. Barrington tried to throw it off.

A supper was given in honour of the rising star of the opera, so he went to it, and did not return to his hotel till early morning.

He fully intended leaving Munich that day; but after breakfast he wandered round to the chapel.

He thought, perhaps, the girl went there often, and he might see her once more.

That fancy to see her again was beginning to grow.

He waited a long time, but she never

came, so he strolled as far as the Karl Strasse. Then he returned to his hotel.

Alphonse desired to know his master's plans, and if he should prepare for their leaving.

Mr. Barrington hesitated. Was the sprain well?

Alphonse made a grimace. He did not wish to go away, for he had relations and friends in Munich.

Mr. Barrington caught at the alternative.

"Very well," he said, "I will remain a day or two longer."

Alphonse was full of apparent gratitude, and secretly wondered what was the real motive for his master's change of mind.

The following morning Mr. Barrington went again to the chapel, the second and third also, each time returning home by the Karl Strasse. On the last day he

met Doctor Müller coming out of Mrs. Cumberland's house.

He knew Doctor Müller, as most people in Munich did, and immediately renewed his acquaintance. Presently he brought the conversation round to the doctor's professional life, and enquired if anyone was ill in the house out of which he had seen him coming.

Then, as far as he knew it, Doctor Müller told him Mrs. Cumberland's history.

Mr. Barrington was deeply interested. He had not been able to decide satisfactorily to what country Esther belonged, for her foreign education had given her a somewhat un-English style.

He invited Dr. Müller to dine with him at his hotel, and after dinner, without seeming too eager, managed to draw him out on the subject of the Cumberlands. All he heard increased his interest, and

he formed a sudden resolve, that come what might, he would get to know Mrs. Cumberland and her daughter. They were evidently strangers in Munich ; country-women of his own, alone, and in impoverished circumstances. The way might surely be made easy.

The next day he sent a basket of fruit and flowers anonymously to the Karl Strasse. He did not wish to give his name at present. A few days after he sent another offering, and to this he attached his card, but again without giving his address.

Another day or two passed ; then he took some grapes and peaches there himself.

Pauline came to the door to receive them, her face radiant with smiles. She made Mr. Barrington a sign to wait while she carried the basket up to Madame. In a few minutes she returned.


Madame was a great invalid, she explained ; but if it was not asking too much, would Monsieur give himself the trouble to walk upstairs.

Mr. Barrington accepted the invitation, feeling as if a beleaguered city had suddenly capitulated.

Pauline led the way, and pausing at the end of a long passage on the second floor, threw open a door and bid him enter.

It was a light, airy room, having two windows draped with muslin curtains. There was no carpet on the floor, only a rug here and there, and, except for the china stove, a few chairs and tables, very little furniture.

Mrs. Cumberland, the central figure, was lying on the sofa, a little table drawn up beside her, on which a few books were placed, besides a vase holding some of the flowers Mr. Barrington had sent. A crimson shawl was thrown lightly over



her, giving just a touch of warmth and colour to what otherwise would have been a somewhat dreary picture.

Pauline closed the door, and Mrs. Cumberland held out a thin, white hand, which Mr. Barrington took into his own, with a firm sympathetic pressure. Her usual pale cheeks were flushed, and her voice trembled, as she thanked him for his kindness. They spoke of their mutual friend Doctor Müller, and Mr. Barrington assured her the pleasure it gave him to find he could be of any use to a country-woman in a foreign land.

Mr. Barrington was a thorough man of the world, with that power of adaptiveness that comes only from great and varied experience; and by the time he had been with Mrs. Cumberland half-an-hour, she felt as if she must have known him for years. Without appearing to do so, he led her gently on to

talk of her own affairs, and was soon in possession of the outline of her history.

Dr. Müller had spoken of Mr. Barrington as a man of money and position, and Mrs. Cumberland's life had been spent too much apart from the world to allow of her having any misgivings as to the prudence of taking a stranger upon trust. She thought she saw, as she had once done before, the finger of Providence in it; and, with her aversion to foreigners, and clinging affection for her native country, she accepted Mr. Barrington's offer of friendship with the warmest gratitude.

He lengthened out his visit in the hope of seeing Esther; but as she did not come, he was at last obliged to take his leave.

Mrs. Cumberland invited him to renew his visit, and Mr. Barrington accepted the invitation with eagerness. He also, he explained, was alone in Munich, and

if he might be allowed to while away a little time in the Karl Strasse, or in any way make himself useful to Mrs. Cumberland, it would give him the greatest pleasure.

When a little later Mrs. Cumberland detailed the account of Mr. Barrington's visit to Esther, she dwelt a great deal on the fortunate circumstance that had at last brought them a friend. Indeed, she was so excited she could hardly speak of anything else.

"I am so glad you saw him, mamma," Esther said, "and I am quite sorry I was out; but it does not really matter, as you say he means to call again."

"Yes, I am sure of that," Mrs. Cumberland replied; and she was right, for the very next day Pauline showed him up. This time Esther was sitting by her mother's sofa. She had some work in her hand, and her pretty head, with its



crown of pale golden hair, was bent over it.

She rose to greet Mr. Barrington with a little smile of welcome. She was so grateful to him for his kindness to her mother, for his wish to be her friend—this man who was old enough to be her father.

Mr. Barrington had been perfectly haunted by Esther's face since the day he had first seen her. Sometimes he fancied her loveliness had perhaps been a delusion, partly due to the surroundings in which he had found her; that the purity of the outline of her face might have been heightened by the background of gorgeous colouring of burnished gold, of subdued glowing lights; but on seeing her again, he knew that he had not been mistaken; that she was even more beautiful than his memory had painted her.

She seemed to him the impersonation

of womanhood where something of childhood still lingers. She more than surpassed his haunting dreams ; she was the realization of an ideal.

Mr. Barrington sat down by Mrs. Cumberland ; Esther, with a smile of thanks, took some flowers he had brought, and began arranging them in a blue bowl standing on her mother's table, joining every now and then in the conversation.

Old Pauline remained in the room, but kept a respectful distance, standing by the farthest window. She was busy knitting a purple stocking, which work now appeared to be her constant occupation when not more actively employed ; an unfinished stocking was always to be seen either in her hands or sticking out of one of the big apron pockets, in company with a ball of worsted, which acted as a sort of target for the long, bright needles.

*ESTHER.*

Mrs. Cumberland talked of England. It was the only subject that really interested her. She had disliked France; she hated Germany, and a conversation with any one who could take her back, even in imagination, to the home of her youth was delightful to her.

Mr. Barrington drew little pictures of London life, and so accurate, so vivid in their word painting that they fancied they could see them.

"If we could only live in England, mamma," Esther said.

Mrs. Cumberland sighed. "I shall never go back, Esther—never!"

"You don't feel stronger since you came to Munich?" Mr. Barrington asked. Then, without waiting for a reply, he continued, "You don't give yourself a proper chance; you should take a drive every day."

Esther's face flushed. Mr. Barrington

saw it, and went on, "I know of an easy carriage. If you will let me come and take you out, it would be giving me the greatest pleasure."

Mrs. Cumberland hesitated, but Esther accepted the offer. She grasped at the idea of anything likely to prolong her mother's life.

Mr. Barrington went away very well pleased with his second visit, which was only the beginning of many others. On one excuse or another he went again and again to the Karl Strasse. He persuaded Mrs. Cumberland into letting him drive her out, and Esther, of course, accompanied them. They left the hot, dusty streets, and wandered about the lovely suburbs. Autumn tints were just touching the trees with a warm umber shade, and nature was at her most luxuriant season.

Mrs. Cumberland really enjoyed this

unexpected break in her life, and even rallied a little. She was one of those women whose minds are intimately connected with their bodies.

Esther, too, was full of gratitude, and Mr. Barrington fell into the position of an old friend. He intended every day to arrange for leaving Munich, and every day still found him there.

He could not tear himself away; Esther was beginning to be essential to his happiness.

“How can I sufficiently thank you for all your goodness to us?” she exclaimed one day. “I often, so very often, wish I had it in my power to let you see how grateful I really am.”

Esther did not dream how her words could move him. She was, whilst speaking, taking some Gloire de Dijon roses he had brought her out of a basket, and her head was bent. Suddenly she looked up.

Mr. Barrington's eyes were resting on her, his handsome dark face was unusually pale, his hand trembled.

"Some day, Esther, I may ask you to fulfil that wish. I wonder, if I were to, would you do it?"

He called her Esther sometimes, but she hardly noticed this, or, if she did, it seemed quite natural, because he was so old compared to her.

"You need not wonder," she said quickly and decidedly; "you may be sure I would."

Mr. Barrington turned away and walked to the window. Esther continued arranging the roses. Her mind had already forgotten what they had been saying, and had wandered back to Villedieu.

She was wishing she could give the flowers to the convent, so that Ma Mère might put them on the Lady altar.

Mr. Barrington's words in their hidden meaning did not touch her.

## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HE weeks went rapidly by. Mrs. Cumberland's rally was only temporary, and when the cold winds began to blow down from the Tyrolese Alps, she took a chill, and was obliged to keep her room. The drives had to be discontinued, and fires lighted in the stove.

Mr. Barrington no longer, even to himself, spoke of leaving Munich. He came to the Karl Strasse every day now as a matter of course, and that visit became the one thing that made his life worth living. He was suddenly transported into an entirely fresh world of sensations, and the possibility of a new phase of life rose before him ; a dazzling picture in which Esther was always the central figure.

Esther, in her entire unconsciousness, grew to feel a sort of comfort and rest when she heard Mr. Barrington's step upon the stairs. She would run to open the door, a glad welcome in her eyes and on her lips.

She never guessed the chains she herself was forging link by link.

Sometimes, when he knocked, she would only say, "Come in ;" and he would find her busy about some little household occupation.

"Mamma will be here directly," she would say, or, "I will run and tell mamma." That Mr. Barrington desired her society, wished to talk to her, never seemed to dawn upon her mind.

One day, when Mr. Barrington called, he found Mrs. Cumberland the only occupant of the sitting-room, Pauline having been sent out for a walk with Esther. Being occasionally left by herself for an hour was one of those sacrifices of her personal



comfort Mrs. Cumberland insisted on making. At times she grew rather anxious about Esther; for it was impossible not to notice that she had quite lost her spirits, the gaiety that had made the little cottage at Villedieu so bright.

No one could help feeling depressed in Munich, Mrs. Cumberland thought, with a sigh as she drew a shawl round her. She was sure, now, this coming to Munich had been a mistake; but, then, all her life had been a series of failures. Destiny had been too strong for her. She had suffered from the faults of others. She had been the victim of circumstances.

Perhaps Mr. Barrington had so timed his visit as to find Mrs. Cumberland alone. Anyhow, she was lying on the sofa, quite by herself, when he went in, an unread book held listlessly in her hand.

After the general conversation, Mr. Barrington brought out a roll of sketches.

“I wanted you to see these,” he said :  
“they are views of my home in Hampshire,  
Rozelle Manor.”

He did not add they had been sent to Munich on purpose, because he wanted to show some sort of proof that he really was what he represented himself to be.

If, a few weeks back, any one had told Mr. Barrington that he would be almost nervously anxious to secure the friendship, to propitiate the favour of an obscure, dying woman, living in lodgings in Munich, and that for the sake of her daughter, a mere child, a smile of derision would have come on his cold, proud face.

But, nevertheless, this thing had come to pass ; this new development of diffidence and humility. He had escaped the fascinations of a hundred pretty women of the world, and had fallen in love with Esther Cumberland.

Mr. Barrington fancied he had put away the idea of marriage long ago. He had weighed the advantages and disadvantages, and hitherto had always found the balance in favour of liberty.

He had considered marriage, no matter who the woman might be, in the light of a sacrifice ; now everything was changed. His old opinions were swept away, and the hope of winning Esther's love had become the first great object of his existence.

The real passion of his life had come to him when the age of youth and romance had passed. He would have given anything to put back the dial of time, to have taken twenty years from his age, so as to have met Esther on more equal grounds.

He drew the sketches out, and laid them, one by one, before Mrs. Cumberland.

Rozelle Manor had been taken from

several points of view. The red turrets rose from behind the stately elms, from the slopes and terrace where the old seneschal stood, and from where you could see the mere, with the water lilies floating on it.

Mr. Barrington pointed out where the house remained as it had been for hundreds of years, and where, later, the alterations had been made.

“You have a beautiful home,” Mrs. Cumberland said, still holding the sketches in her hand, a dim consciousness of why she was asked to admire, and be interested in them gradually dawning upon her mind.

“I have never lived there,” he said.  
“I never shall live there, alone.”

Mrs. Cumberland laid the sketches down, and her eyes met Mr. Barrington’s.

Mr. Barrington behaved in a perfectly straightforward manner. The ice once broken, he went straight to the point.

He wished, before speaking to Esther, he said, to feel sure he had her mother's consent to his doing so. He allowed there were drawbacks; that he was old compared to her; but if Esther had no other attachment, if Mrs. Cumberland had no other views for her, then he might urge the advantage arising from his being a rich man, and able to give her—indeed, both of them, everything that money could procure.

Mrs. Cumberland was dreadfully agitated. Her wildest hopes seemed about to be realized, and her little Cinderella was going to be a princess after all.

She promised Mr. Barrington to do all that lay in her power to further his wishes, to use her influence in his favour.

“Esther is only a child,” she said, hesitatingly, after they had talked some time; “and, remember, she has seen nothing of the world; but if you have patience, I think all will come right.”

Mrs. Cumberland's sympathies were already enlisted on Mr. Barrington's side; but she did not feel sure Esther would be brought to consent. The remembrance of those half-love scenes with Angus intruded disagreeably; but there was nothing, she thought, that Mr. Barrington need be told. There never had been anything tangible. Angus might have spoken, and did not. Now, she was dying, and Esther had the chance of being well provided for, to consider Angus, and his boyish attentions, as any hindrance to her settlement in life, would be absurd.

Nevertheless, she waited Esther's return with nervous eagerness.

Esther must be made to consent, she decided. Esther's future should never be sacrificed as her own had been. Alone in Munich, with no money, and only old Pauline, what would eventually become of her child?

Mr. Barrington's offer was like a saving

hand, stretched out just as the waters were closing over her.

At last Esther returned from her walk. Pauline set about getting the tea, whilst Esther drew a low chair to her mother's side, threw off her hat, took up one of the sketches of Rozelle Manor, and said, lightly:

"I see Mr. Barrington has been here. I am so glad, mother dear; but I wish I had known it, for I should have enjoyed my walk ten times more if I had only thought you were not alone."

"He came to show me those sketches, Esther. That is his home in Hampshire," Mrs. Cumberland replied.

"It seems a lovely old place," Esther said, admiringly.

"And, Esther, he came to tell me something—something, I think, you will be surprised to hear."

"What was it?" Esther said quickly;  
"Mamma, what has happened?"

Then Mrs. Cumberland told her news.

Esther's face, which a minute before had been bright and flushed by exercise, grew deathly white.

"You told him no, mother," she said, "you explained it was impossible?"

"Why impossible, Esther."

"I thought, mother, you of all people would understand that to marry a man you did not care for would be wrong."

"In most cases, yes; but Mr. Barrington is so good, so kind, that in time you must learn to love him; and think, Esther, you would never know, as I have done, what it is to be poor, neglected, and forgotten."

"Mother, dear Mother," Esther exclaimed, with a little cry as she knelt down beside her, "don't let us say that. We have always been happy; we have had each other!"

"But when I am gone, Esther, and



something tells me I am not long for this world, you will be left alone ; alone and friendless. There is not one person in all the world who would come to you."

A faint blush mounted to Esther's face.

Her mother saw it. "You are thinking of Angus," she said, sadly. "Believe me, Esther, he will never return ; his father will never let him. He was only a boy ; he has not come, or even written. You may be sure he has forgotten us long ago."

Esther's lips quivered. The memory of Angus, the happy days they had spent together, and their last parting, rose vividly before her. It was so hard to believe he had forgotten what she remembered so distinctly.

"I can't marry Mr. Barrington," she said, slowly ; "I would rather, a thousand times, be poor and alone all my life."

Mrs. Cumberland sank back exhausted on her cushions. It seemed to her that nothing in this world would ever come right.

Esther brought her mother a cup of tea, and hung over her with tender caresses.

It would be wisest, perhaps, not to press the question, Mrs. Cumberland decided, as she watched Esther's face. She would wait a little and talk the subject over with Pauline.



## CHAPTER VII.

**P**AULINE was greatly excited. "He is a grand Seigneur," she said, "and mademoiselle might yet have her *hôtel* in Paris."

"And live in England, Pauline," Mrs. Cumberland added. "I see it all quite distinctly; I shall be gone, but Esther will be rich and happy."

"But, mother darling," Esther would reply, when later Mrs. Cumberland laid these attractive sides of the picture before her, "I have never known what it was to have riches. I don't care for money; I should not know how to use it."

"You would soon get used to that, Esther. It is so much easier to rise than fall."

"But Mr. Barrington is so old; old enough to be my father."

"A man of his age, Esther, judges better than a boy of who is likely to make him happy, and is less likely to change."

"I don't care, mamma, I can't accept his offer; you must write at once and say so."

So Mrs. Cumberland wrote a note to Mr. Barrington, and Pauline carried it to his hotel. She explained that she had told Esther of his proposal, but Esther was so young that the idea of marriage had never entered her head, and it would perhaps be better to give her a few days to think it calmly over, before she made up her mind, and before he came again to the Karl Strasse.

Mrs. Cumberland could think of nothing else to say, wishing, as she did, to gain time. Once Esther saw Mr. Barrington

whilst in her present frame of mind, she would be sure to refuse him; then Mr. Barrington would leave Munich, and all her brilliant hopes for the future would be destroyed.

Mr. Barrington for reply, sent back a few lines of acquiescence. He was most willing, he said, to let the answer remain undecided. He would leave Munich for a week, and then he would return and come for his answer.

He wrote to Esther a long letter, and it touched her greatly; for without letting it seem as if offered in any way as a bribe, he showed her plainly, if she married him, how entirely she would then have it in her power to give her mother every comfort; how in all the future neither of them would ever again want for anything.

He spoke of his love in a manly, straightforward way, and ended by beg-

ging that Esther, for his sake, as well as her own, would decide nothing hastily.

It was a miserable week for Esther. Mrs. Cumberland would lie on the sofa, and morning, noon, and night, go over the same old ground, till, at last, Esther saw her future life through the mist of a gathering despair.

The desire for Esther to marry Mr. Barrington had taken such a firm hold of Mrs. Cumberland's mind that she could not rest. She grew feverish and excited. She fully believed it would be for Esther's happiness, and that it was her duty to urge it.

Esther's reluctance was nothing—an idea. She saw only the bright side of the picture, and refused to contemplate any other.

Doctor Müller pronounced Mrs. Cumberland's health to be worse.

"If she does not get better nights," he

said, gravely, "I cannot answer for the consequences."

Esther was alarmed.

What did her feelings signify. If her mother could only be made happy, had she any right to consult her own inclinations?

The spirit of sacrifice is strong in the young.

What if her mother were to die suddenly, with her last great wish unfulfilled? How then would she be able to bear the future, with its agony of remorse?

The evening before the day of Mr. Barrington's expected return, Doctor Müller called, and he seemed to think more seriously than ever of his patient's case.

Esther was in despair. As soon as he left, she went to her own room, took off a little silver cross, which was hung round her neck by a bit of blue ribbon, and locked it away carefully in a small dressing-case.

It was the cross Angus had given her in Villedieu. She had worn it ever since, and in parting with it she believed she was severing the last link of that imaginary chain which had made her in the old days fancy she was bound to him.

She crept down to her mother's room.

"Mother," she said, softly, "I am willing to do anything you wish. To make you happy I will marry Mr. Barington."

With a little sob, Mrs. Cumberland folded her arms round her. She had feared the victory was uncertain. She hardly realised it was won.

"You have taken a heavy load off your mother's heart, Esther," she said, solemnly, "and God will reward you."

\* \* \* \* \*

On the following morning, Mrs. Cumberland was full of plans. She had not



slept, but she was not tired. All the possibilities of the future spread themselves out before her mind's eye in a panorama of delightful and exciting events.

Esther's trousseau would have to be got. Her little Esther, whose days of poverty were so soon to end.

Pauline was the bearer of another note to Mr. Barrington's hotel.

Mrs. Cumberland thought it best, she wrote to him, that his first interview with Esther should be alone, and without the chance of interruption; so she had arranged he was to meet her in the English Gardens on the following afternoon, when Pauline should take her there.

It was a lovely day, though the end of October, when Esther, with that new pathetic expression of sadness on her young face, passed through the garden gates.

The linden trees were still in full autumn

foliage, the borders bright with flowers, the plantations, intersected by streams of sparkling water and groups of statuary, seemed a very Eden, where happy lovers might wander in utter forgetfulness of the outside world.

Pauline and Esther went a little way down the broad walk towards the beautiful Ionic Columns, then they paused, for they saw Mr. Barrington approaching.

"Stay with me, Pauline," Esther said, entreatingly, laying her hand upon her arm.

"Madame is alone," Pauline answered.

Esther relaxed her hold.

Pauline went quickly away. Esther watched her white cap and little red shawl till they vanished in the distance.

Then she turned, and met Mr. Barrington.

## CHAPTER VIII.

**F**OR a time after Esther's engagement, Mrs. Cumberland was supremely happy. Physically, she actually seemed to have taken a new lease of life.

Mr. Barrington spent a greater part of his days in the Karl Strasse, and a beautiful diamond ring sparkled on Esther's finger.

Lovely presents, both for herself and her mother, were continually arriving. No expressed wish remained ungratified. The easiest and most luxurious of couches replaced the old, hard sofa. Everything medical skill could suggest, or money procure, was now within Mrs. Cumberland's reach, and an invalid carriage had even been ordered from Paris.

Esther felt if her life could only drift on as it was now doing, it would not be altogether unhappy. She tried never to think of Angus, for she had a very tender conscience, and she thought it would be wrong to do so. Mr. Barrington was a very pleasant companion. He laid himself out to win Esther's love, and in return, he gained her gratitude. It was difficult to think of him as more than a friend; but his friendship certainly brightened her life.

He took her to the picture galleries. He lent her books, and was watchful over her happiness in a hundred unspoken ways.

Things were drifting on in this manner when Mrs. Cumberland's illness suddenly developed new and alarming symptoms.

"I am dying, Esther," she exclaimed, after three days and nights of intense

suffering. "I feel sure of it now, and I can't leave this—I can't die happy, unless I know that you are safely married."

Esther was kneeling by her mother's bedside, holding both her hands in hers.

"I would never leave you, mother," she said.

"You need not, Esther. I have thought it all over. I have spoken to Mr. Barrington. He would not take you away; he would not want to do so as long as I am alive; but, Esther, grant me my last prayer. Let the marriage take place at once."

Mr. Barrington added his entreaties.

"You may trust me, Esther," he said; "all shall be exactly as it is now between us, but when you have most need of me I shall then have the right to take care of you."

Esther felt as if black walls were closing round her on all sides.

She had not the courage to set her will against her dying mother's, Mr. Barrington's, or even Pauline's.

"You will do as I wish ; I know you will," her mother kept reiterating ; and at last Esther yielded.

It was a strange, hurried wedding, and it took place in the Karl Strasse.

Mrs. Cumberland wished to be present, and was too weak to go to church. As it was, she had to be carried from her bed to the couch in the sitting-room, where the marriage service was performed.

Besides old Pauline, Dr. Müller, and the English chaplain, no one else was present.

Pauline dressed Esther in a white dress.

"Take it away," Esther said quickly, when she saw it lying on her little bed ; "I prefer my dark gown. It is far more suitable."

“Madame has arranged this,” Pauline replied, coaxingly, “she would be disappointed now if it were not worn.”

Then, silently, Esther let her put it on.

It was not a time to think or care about trifles. Her one wish was to make her mother happy. Once the great sacrifice was possible, all lesser things were nothing in the balance.

Pauline completed her toilette by fastening some white roses in her hair and in the bosom of her dress—Mr. Barrington’s roses.

Then, as if she were living in a dream, Esther walked into the sitting-room.

With a little sob upon her lips, she went to her mother, and laid her head upon her lap.

Mrs. Cumberland was terribly agitated, and, as she held Esther tightly in her arms, her resolution wavered.

What if, after all, she were doing wrong?

What if she had made another mistake?

It was Esther who first gained command over herself, because she saw her mother's physical weakness could no longer bear the strain.

With a face as white as the roses in her hair, she crossed the room, and placed herself by Mr. Barrington's side.

The marriage service began and ended.

It was quickly over; a few words, a few prayers, a blessing; and Esther had parted for ever with her sweet girlhood, and had entered on a new phase of existence.

Mr. Barrington drew her into his arms, and kissed her white lips; nothing now but death could part them.

Doctor Müller and the chaplain offered their congratulations, whilst Pauline busied herself about some refreshments.



A little later, Mrs. Cumberland, exhausted and faint from fatigue and excitement, was carried back to her room by Mr. Barrington ; and Esther, after changing her dress, resumed her seat at her mother's bedside.

Before consenting to this hurried marriage, Esther had received Mr. Barrington's solemn promise that everything should go on just as it had done before, that she should never, whilst her mother lived, be asked to leave her ; so there was nothing, except that gold circle upon her finger, to remind her that she was no longer Esther Cumberland, but Mr. Barrington's wife.



## CHAPTER IX.

**A**NGUS MACPHERSON'S foreign tour did not afford him the satisfaction he had once anticipated it would. He was listless and pre-occupied. The enthusiasm he had expected to feel, when he had seen those things which from a boy he had longed to see, was altogether wanting. He was only anxious now to return home and begin life in earnest.

When first he joined his friend in Paris, Mr. Thurlow rallied him about his long stay in Villedieu, hinting that there must have been some hidden attraction to account for it; but Angus had responded sharply, and was altogether inclined to be so reserved about his doings that the subject was avoided.

Of course Mr. Thurlow naturally concluded there had been some reason for his change of plans, beyond what Angus had chosen to give; but recognising the point must not be pressed, he wisely let it drop.

Two days after his arrival in Paris, Angus suggested leaving it.

"Supposing we get on with our travels," he said.

"You don't surely mean you want to go away yet?" Mr. Thurlow exclaimed. "To come to Paris for the first time, and leave it without seeing half its lions, seems ridiculous."

"Paris won't run away," Angus replied, coolly. "Some day I shall return and do it thoroughly. You have been very forbearing, Thurlow, and wasted plenty of time here; I can't expect you to go with me over the same old ground; besides, I have already seen a good deal."

Mr. Thurlow laughed.

“You have looked into the Louvre, and Notre Dame, walked round the Palais Royal, and dined in the Bois de Boulogne, but how about the opera, theatres, Versailles, St. Cloud, and the hundred other things?”

“They will all keep, my dear fellow; I tell you I mean to come back.”

As he said it, Angus thought of Esther, and the time when he would bring her to Paris—Esther, his bride.

Mr. Thurlow made no further opposition; so they went to Brussels.

It was another Paris, only on a smaller scale. They wandered about its magnificent palaces, and lingered in the picture galleries. The cathedral of St. Gudule, with its beautiful Gothic architecture, the statues in the nave of the twelve apostles, the elaborate carved pulpit, all seemed to Angus not half so interesting as the old Norman pile in Villedieu.

Without Esther's presence, the charm had gone out of everything. The capacity to enjoy life was absent from him, as it had been from her.

They left Brussels and went to Cologne.

"Let us push on!" that was always Angus' cry.

Cologne could not be seen in a few days, so they stayed there a week. Mr. Thurlow was delighted—absorbed. He adored art. He painted a little himself, and was hardly to be dragged away. The cathedral, the many churches, the pictures by Rubens, the elaborate carvings, the magnificent altar pieces, the antiquities of Greece and Rome, all held him in bondage. He protested against leaving; but Angus was at last inexorable.

"Remember," he said, "I must be home early in November."

They went up the Rhine, making short stays at Frankfort, Strasburg and Basle;

crossed the Bernese Oberland, saw a sunrise from the Rigi, and watched avalanches of ice falling from the Jungfrau. They slept two nights at Chamounix, ascended Mont Blanc, and finally halted in Geneva.

One lovely evening the two young men were lying down in a boat, which was being idly rowed about the deep blue lake.

"I call this a life worth living," Thurlow exclaimed, enthusiastically; "a life calculated to expand the ideas, to enlarge the mind. What say you, Macpherson, shall we go to Rome? The spirit of travel is on me. I feel unrested, and I believe nothing short of Rome will satisfy me."

"I am afraid you will have to go alone," Angus replied; "you know I must be in London in November; besides, I want to get back and begin my work."

"What does work matter for a few

weeks?" Thurlow replied, idly, blowing a curl of smoke from his cigar into the soft, night air. "You may as well wait for briefs in Rome as in London."

"I know, as you say, I may have to wait; but I must be on the spot, so as not to lose my chance, should it come."

What did work not mean to him, Angus reflected in the silence that followed. It meant independence, an income of his own, the right to speak to Esther.

"You are an independent man, Thurlow," Angus continued, presently; "you are heir to your father's property, you have a fixed income already, whilst I——"

"You are an only son, with a rich father."

"It is not riches I want; but an independent income of my own earning; till that object is attained, not even Rome would attract me."

Mr. Thurlow looked at his companion from under his lowered eyelids. There was, he fancied, a new expression on his face ; certainly he had changed. First, the old boyish brightness had gone ; the high spirits that had made him such a favourite, both at Eton and Oxford, were altogether wanting. Hitherto he had been so wrapped up in his own amusements, that he had hardly noticed this ; now that he had come to think things quietly over, he decided that Angus had been moody and abstracted, and also that something had certainly happened at Villedieu beyond what he first supposed. Once suggested, this conviction grew ; but Mr. Thurlow did not speak his thoughts.

They turned their steps homewards. Angus had begged his friend to go on to Rome without him, but this he declined to do.

“I am very enthusiastic, and all that



sort of thing," he replied ; " but I must have someone to listen to my ravings."

The journey back to England was made by the shortest route, and they did not stay beyond a day anywhere.

When they reached London they parted. Mr. Thurlow went to his father's home in Yorkshire ; Angus to Fulham.

Mr. Macpherson did not say much about the prolonged visit at Villedieu ; perhaps he thought it best to pass it over lightly. Angus asked his father a few questions, and heard about the fifty pounds a year. His mother was more expansive. She wanted to know about Esther, the girl her husband had once offered to adopt.

How strange it would have been, Angus thought, if Esther had been brought up as his sister ; but, somehow, he could never picture her in those handsomely furnished, formal rooms at Fulham, or leading the life his sisters did. Once he thought he

would take his mother into his confidence, and tell her about his love, his hopes, his intentions ; then he changed his mind. He would wait for one year, and, later, everything should be arranged.

Mr. Macpherson was a shrewd man of business, who from his youth had worked hard and unremittingly. He had feared his son, whose character differed from his own, would not put his shoulder to the wheel and keep it going ; so that the new development in Angus rather startled his father.

He had always been ambitious for his son, but had hitherto feared his son would never be sufficiently ambitious for himself ; and Angus being in a hurry to get into harness surprised him not a little. He did not guess the motive. He had married late in life himself ; made a wise, delicate choice, what the world calls a prudent selection. Love of money had come to

be a ruling passion long before he thought of a wife.

He was a hard, conscientious, upright Scotchman ; a man who, according to his lights, wished to do his duty. He intended Angus should marry well ; not too young, perhaps not till he had made his mark ; certainly not till he had in some measure distinguished himself. He considered all things were open to his son as a successful barrister ; he even dreamed of the woolsack.

Angus falling so readily into his own way of thinking was most gratifying to him

Angus declined remaining at Fulham, so lived in chambers in the Temple ; and his father approved the step, acknowledging that the constant distractions of home life would be a serious interruption to work. He went occasionally down to Fulham, from Saturday to Monday ; but all through the winter and early spring he worked

really hard. He abjured society; read steadily during the evenings; and finally began to see his way to that independence he alone felt would justify him in going back to Esther. He did not wish to mislead his father. He meant to be quite candid with him when the right time came; but he was quite determined to marry for love.

One day in the spring, just after he had been pleading a case in the court at Westminster, which the judge had given in his favour, his father came to his rooms to see him.

People were already talking of his luck. It was one of those brilliant strokes of fortune which would be sure to bring further success in its train.

“You will be a great man yet, Angus,” Mr. Macpherson said, glowing with paternal pride. “We shall have to look out for an heiress for you.”

“I shall never marry a girl with money,” Angus replied, earnestly. “I will give you, some day, a better daughter than any other girl would be; no matter what her fortune were. My mind is already made up on that point. You must not press me for my meaning yet; but some day, soon, I will explain what I can only hint at now.”

“You are not engaged?”

“No, not exactly; but I hope to be soon, and when I am you may be sure I will tell you everything.”

Mr. Macpherson’s face fell, and the smile left his lips. An inkling, a suspicion of the horrible truth dawned upon his mind.

He went home, and brooded over it. He lay awake at nights thinking of it. He took no one into his confidence; not even his wife. He very seldom did confide in her. He was a man who believed in himself, and was always prepared to act on

his own judgment. He did nothing hastily; nothing on impulse. He weighed all the pros and cons; looked at the question from all sides; then, when a month had passed, he thought he saw his way clearly, and wrote that letter to Esther.



## CHAPTER X.

**I**N the following July, Angus made all his arrangements, so as to go to Villedieu and ask Esther to be his wife. He did not expect to be able to marry yet. He was prepared for difficulties ; but his foot was now firmly planted on the first rung of the ladder, and he felt he was quite justified in speaking, in becoming engaged.

In the quiet of his chambers, his mind was always conjuring up that meeting.

He would have to bring his wood-violet to London ; but she should not live in the midst of its crowd and bustle.

In his walks he often wandered far out into the suburbs, trying to decide upon a locality that would be suitable for a

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home—making a hundred plans, and living in a world of his own creating.

Just when he was ready to leave London, his mother was taken ill.

At first her attack promised to be severe; but the dangerous symptoms quickly subsided, and finally nothing but care was required.

Angus considered now he might safely go away, and suggested it to his father; but Mr. Macpherson objected.

“Your mother likes you to be near at hand,” he said. “Go where you like for a couple of days, but be within reach.”

Angus was a dutiful son, so he obeyed; but he chafed inwardly. He thought sometimes, he would write to Esther; but he could not make up his mind to do it, for an interview would, on all points, be so much more satisfactory.

It was not till the second week in October



that his mother was pronounced fit to go to the sea-side, and Angus was free. The beginning of November must see him back in London. His time was terribly limited ; but, once he had taken Esther in his arms, once he had her promise to be his, he thought he should be satisfied, that he would be content to wait.

He retraced his steps to Normandy by the old route. He was no longer a gay, careless boy, but a man, with a man's intensity of purpose.

It was late at night when he reached Villedieu, and climbed down from the diligence at the door of the Trois Couronnes. Dim little oil lamps were swinging across the primitive old street. Marie was standing in the yard with a lanthorn in her hand, looking out for passengers. She nodded a familiar welcome.

"Perhaps Monsieur would like his old chamber, numéro 25," and she passed

before him up the dark, uncarpeted staircase, and threw open the door.

Nothing was changed. More than a year had gone by, but it might have been only a week—a day.

The bed, with its white lace curtains, and monster yellow eiderdown, stood in the recess. The formal bits of furniture were all exactly in the same place. The same clock ticked on the mantelpiece.

Angus went across to the window and looked out. The tired horses, which had brought the *diligence*, were being led into the stable, and a little group was gathered just outside the hotel door, chatting and gesticulating with shrill harsh voices. He had intended going up to the cottage at once, but it was so late he decided that perhaps it would be better to wait until the morning.

The Cathedral clock chimed the hour of eleven.

“By this time to-morrow,” Angus thought, exultingly, “I shall have seen my darling and told her all.”

He undressed, put out the light, and threw himself on his bed ; but he could not sleep.

Why did the hours drag by so slowly? The chiming of the quarters became a sort of nightmare, so that even when he fell into a troubled sleep, he woke to count them. The monotonous regularity of their repetitions grew at last so unbearable that he got up, went back to the window and opened it.

The little town was perfectly quiet now, the lamps extinguished, and only the stars shining over it. He remained leaning out for an hour or more, thinking everything over, then he went back to bed, and fell at last into the heavy, tired sleep of youth.

When he woke it was morning ; the

sun was shining, and as it was market day, a very babel of sounds filled the little street. Carts were going by laden with vegetables, wooden shoes clattered noisily on the rough, round stones of the pavement; all was exuberant life and bustle; the same old life Angus remembered so well.

He got up and dressed hastily. It was only seven; but Esther would be about, he knew; Esther and Pauline. He went down into the big *salle* and ordered a cup of coffee, for he had taken nothing on his arrival the night before.

He drank it standing, then he went out into the bright morning. Marie was sweeping the doorstep.

"*À la bonne heure,*" she said, and Angus felt it was a benediction.

He went down the street and turned his steps to the old road leading up to

the cottage. Though so late in the year, it was like summer, a fresh, sweet morning, when nature acts like a tonic, making the very heart glad.

Angus had no presentiment of evil ; he was quite unprepared. He fancied every minute he might catch a glimpse of Esther ; a look of expectancy was on his handsome young face ; a smile in his dark eyes ; the quick pulses of love and youth throbbed in his veins.

Would Esther be standing at the gate—his Esther ?

He paused before the cottage, struck by some horrible fear. What did the deserted look mean ? He tried the gate, and found it locked, by a padlock on a rusty chain. The window out of which he had last seen Esther's sweet, sad face was barred by rough planks of wood. The vine was hanging untrained upon the wall.

He sprang over the little iron railing, and stood inside the garden, feeling dazed. Some China roses, scarlet geraniums, and mignonette were still in bloom ; but all grew together in unkempt, tangled profusion, a deserted wilderness.

Angus's face grew white with fear. What did it mean? He tried the doors. He went round to the little garden at the back, and stood once again under the Spanish chestnut tree. There were no white blossoms on it now, and the withered, dead leaves were lying at his feet instead.

A horrible solution of the mystery suddenly presented itself to his mind. Mrs. Cumberland was dead. She had used to say, feebly :

"I shall never leave Villedieu, I know that ; I am destined to die and be buried here ;" and if so, what had become of Esther?

Strange to say, the thought of them going away had never crossed Angus's mind, so that the shock and disappointment came with unbroken force. There was no one to ask, nothing to be done, by remaining at the cottage. He tried the doors once more, and even called aloud, but no one answered, not a sound was to be heard, so he went slowly back again to the Trois Couronnes.

Perhaps, after all, he thought, they were living in the town; perhaps they had only changed houses.

Why had he been content, though, to let things rest? Why had he not written, as he had so often meant to do? Why had no warning voice whispered the truth?

Madame Delepine was very busy about the breakfast; the principal shopkeepers, and the commercial travellers staying at the hotel were hurrying into the *salle*.

Marie was placing bottles of cider and *vin ordinaire* on the long table, and there was a pleasant smell of fried potatoes and omelettes coming from the kitchen.

Although Madame Delepine was so full of business, Angus managed to draw her aside.

"Where," he asked, "was Mrs. Cumberland; had she left Villedieu?"

"Yes, they had all left; La dame Anglaise, La belle demoiselle, and Pauline."

"Had they been gone long?"

"These four months and more."

"Where had they gone?"

"Ah! That was more than Madame Delepine or anyone else knew. They went quite suddenly, and left no one any address. They sold their furniture, paid their bills, had an old *calèche* up to the cottage to bring madame and the luggage down to the hotel, and had



left the Trois Couronnes by diligence for Paris."

"Was Mrs. Cumberland stronger?"

"*Mon dieu, non.* Madame looked like death, and was far too feeble to walk. Why she undertook a journey in her state of health was a mystery to everybody. Breakfast was ready, would Monsieur come in and have some?"

Angus turned mechanically into the *salle*, and sat down with the rest. Marie smiled and nodded at him, pressing him to eat her savoury dishes. There was a great chattering of voices all around, but he did not join in the conversation, and as soon as his hunger was satisfied he went out, and wandered round the town.

Everything was so unchanged that it seemed to him at every turn he must meet Pauline carrying her big basket. The market was virtually over, but

groups of peasant girls, selling fish and eggs, little bouquets of flowers, crowns of immortelles in white and yellow everlasting, still lingered about, young girls with ruddy cheeks and smiling lips and eyes, beaming with content.

Angus made his way to the fruit stalls. There were friends of Esther's there, familiar old figures, and lined, brown faces under the great white linen caps. He bought some red October peaches, and gave them to a beggar who was passing, carrying a little sickly child in her strong, bare arms. Then he spoke of Esther.

"Did they never see her now?"

"Never! La belle Demoiselle Anglaise, she was gone, and she never came back."

"Where had she gone?"

"Ah, she could not tell, the blessed Virgin only knew."

Angus turned away, and went into the cathedral.

That also breathed of Esther—his lost Esther. The loneliness of his life oppressed him. His disappointment was so great he could hardly bear it. He remained some time in the cathedral trying to steady his mind, to collect his thoughts; then he went out, and strolled back to the cottage, vaguely hoping he might find some clue.

All the afternoon he wandered over the same walks he and Esther had taken together, recalling everything with vivid distinctness. Suddenly a new idea struck him. He would go to the convent and enquire there of Esther from the Mother Superior. Esther had always spoken warmly of her love for the nuns, and their kindness to her. Perhaps she had written, or in some way communicated with them.

No sooner had this idea presented itself, than the conviction of its probability grew in his mind to be a certainty. The

hope of success raised Angus' spirits. He went rapidly, almost joyfully, down the hill, and turned into the lower road.

Great iron gates barred the entrance to the convent grounds, but a small inner door, for foot passengers, was left standing open, and he went through it into a long avenue of pine trees.

It was already beginning to get dusk, so he hurried on. Presently a turn brought him in sight of the convent—the large grey stone building he had often seen from the heights above.

Everything was intensely still, and the sound of the great iron-handled bell, as he rang it, seemed to reverberate through empty walls.

His summons brought a portress, an ancient lay sister, who looked greatly surprised when she saw who the visitor was.

“Could he speak with the Lady Superior?” he asked.

The Sister did not know, but requested to be told his business.

"Say it is urgent," Angus replied, and he gave his card.

She took it, and went away, closing the door carefully behind her.

What seemed an age elapsed ; then she returned, and motioning Angus to follow went before him, across a large stone, hall, into a big room, and there left him alone. The refectory was almost empty. A long, unpolished oak table, a few plain chairs, no curtains against the tall, iron-barred windows, no ornaments against the bare, white walls, only a large black crucifix over the high, wooden mantel-piece.

After waiting for what seemed to Angus, in his impatience, an indefinite time, the door at last opened, and the Lady Abbess came slowly in.

She was an old woman, and leaned for

support on a stick ; but there was, nevertheless, great dignity, and something very commanding in her whole bearing. She wore the black habit of the *Sacré Cœur*, and the white linen about her withered face gave her an unearthly look ; but for all that there was a kindly twinkle in her brown eyes.

She bowed to Angus, and remained standing, evidently waiting to hear what he had to say.

Angus hastened to explain his errand.

Miss Cumberland, Esther, was his cousin. He had come to Villedieu from England expressly to see her and her mother, and, much to his surprise, had found them gone, and, more strange still, without leaving any address behind them. He had heard so much of "*Ma mère*" from Esther, that he felt sure if anyone knew anything about them she would, and he had ventured to ask for this interview,

hoping she would be able to tell him where they now were, as it was necessary, for a very important reason, he should find them.

The Lady Superior shook her head.

“Esther had come to wish them good-bye. Her mother, she said, was to go away in order to be placed under the care of a great physician; but she was not allowed to tell anything, or even mention where their final destination was to be. Everything had been very suddenly arranged. Esther had cried at parting from them. They were all fond of her; she was like one of them; and she was sure she would have told them everything if she had been at liberty to do so, but she could not break her word; and the conditions she had told them were—that if she accepted the means to go away she was to be silent.”

A new light flashed into Angus' mind,

one of those clairvoyant inspirations that come to everyone at times.

His father had done this thing. A red flush of pain and anger rose into his hitherto pale cheeks, and a new, hard expression came on his young face.

The Mother Superior watched him narrowly. She had lived in the world once herself, when she was young, and she understood the signs of its teaching. She saw now that something unusual had happened. She thought of her own dead youth and its turbulent passions, lived down though they were now, and almost forgotten.

And she gave a little sigh.

Angus had nothing more to learn; the convent could tell him nothing beyond what he had already learnt at the Trois Couronnes; so, thanking the Mother Superior, he went out, and retraced his steps through the Pine Avenue.



Hitherto he had never suspected his father's interference, but he saw it all now. His father had taken this extreme measure in order to separate him from Esther. He remembered distinctly now the half confidence he had given, and bitterly regretted it. He went up to the Cottage once more, and stood for the last time by the little gate.

It was nearly dark now, and one by one the stars were beginning to show in the deep blue sky of the Autumn evening.

Presently the convent below was lighted up, and little points of flame came glimmering through the trees.

Then the vesper bell rang, and the nuns' voices were borne up to him as they had so often been before, when he had stood there with Esther.

At first the music was soft and melodious, then a chill came over him, for it seemed

to him that suddenly it changed, and it was  
a requiem they sang.

It was the Miserere.

\* \* \* \* \*

That night Angus left Villedieu, and re-  
turned to England.



## CHAPTER XI.

**M**R. MACPHERSON was sitting in his library at Fulham. He was leaning back in a comfortable morocco arm-chair, which was drawn up in front of the cheerful fire. There was a pleasant, subdued glow in the room, an air of warmth and comfort heightened by the ruddy blaze of light thrown on the carved oak furniture, on the rich dark-red walls and curtains.

He had a good deal to think about ; but, to judge from the expression of his face, the subjects were not unpleasant.

The fact was, his daughter Jeanette had received an offer of marriage, which she had accepted. His future son-in-law was a man as old as himself ; indeed, they had

begun life together. He was a widower, and not a generally attractive man ; and Mr. Macpherson was more than a little surprised at Jeanette's accepting him. He would not have influenced her to do so ; but he was glad of it.

If it had been his little daughter Ella who was going from them, he would, perhaps, have felt differently ; for if he had a weak spot in his nature, it was shown in his love for her. He had a great respect for Jeanette, and unlimited confidence in her judgment. She had been a most reliable member of his house, and he would miss her sorely.

He was very ambitious for Angus. His eldest daughter marrying a capitalist, a man of wide business connection, besides immense wealth, was a good beginning. He had been to London to tell Angus the news, for he was not sure he had left town, nor did he know where he was.

Presently the door opened, and Angus came in.

“My boy!” exclaimed his father, heartily, “I was just thinking of you. I went to your chambers, to-day, to see if you were there. Where have you been?”

Mr. Macpherson extended his hand, but Angus did not take it.

“I have been to France,” he said.

“To France!” and all the brightness fled from Mr. Macpherson’s face.

“I went to France,” Angus continued, in a cold, hard voice, “to see my cousin Esther, to ask her to be my wife. Father, I have come now to ask you, where is my cousin Esther?”

Mr. Macpherson had risen, and did not again sit down. Something of the same hard look was in his face as there was in his son’s; an expression that indicated a Scotch will—stern and unbending.

“What if I do not choose to tell you

where Mrs. Cumberland and her daughter are ? ”

“ Then, you do know ? ”

“ Yes, I know ; and if you had asked me you might have saved yourself a useless journey.”

“ You have sent them from Villedieu ? ”

“ I gave them the means of going, subject to their own inclination. Mrs. Cumberland, I ascertained, was so ill that a first-rate physician was a necessity. I met the necessity.”

“ She was not fit to travel. You did not consider that, and you sent her to Paris.”

“ No ; not to Paris. Look here, Angus, I may as well be candid with you. I accidentally found out, or, rather, I guessed, that the thing I most dreaded had come to pass. Through an unforeseen accident, you met and fell in love with Esther, and, consequently, into the toils

of Mrs. Cumberland, my step-brother's widow. You desired to make the girl your wife; you were working, not for success, as I once fondly supposed, but for that."

"Yes, I was working for that. Can't you understand, father, that the best incentive a young man can have to lead the higher life is when he has an object to attain? I had that object in Esther Cumberland. I did not tell you, or anyone, I cared for her. I did not think it would be honourable. My regret now is that I was too scrupulous. I did not wish to do anything to mislead you; I worked to make myself independent. I only waited to tell you when I knew myself—then——"

"Can you suppose, Angus, for one moment, after I guessed the truth," Mr. Macpherson interrupted, passionately, "I should stand calmly by, and let my son, my only son, throw away every chance in life

for the sake of marrying for love, at four and twenty? I knew the only remedy was separation; I determined you two should not meet again, and I arranged accordingly."

"Do you suppose, father," Angus replied, bitterly, "I am likely to give up Esther Cumberland? If you will tell me where Esther is, I will do nothing rashly, nothing without first consulting you; only, remember, there are some things no man, not even a father, has a right to decide for one, and one of them is the choice of a wife. My selection is made, nothing now can alter it. Where is Esther Cumberland?"

For a moment Mr. Macpherson hesitated; then his heart hardened.

It was madness that his handsome boy, with all the world before him, should be allowed to throw himself away on a girl like Esther Cumberland. He meant his son's marriage to be the crowning point



of a brilliant career. He had seen, others also had seen, the germs of future greatness in him. The world was already beginning to recognise his talents, and this being the case, what successes were not open to him? An obscure marriage would be his ruin.

Mr. Macpherson had been standing before the fire, his head a little bent, absorbed in his own reflections.

"Are you going to tell me?" Angus asked, at length.

Mr. Macpherson raised his head. "No, I shall not tell you; go back to your work, Angus, and forget a foolish dream. You will not think me right now, but the time will come when you will thank me."

"No, it never will, father. I tell you plainly, though I have to search the world through, I will find my cousin Esther."

Then Angus went out and closed the door

behind him, and left Mr. Macpherson once more alone.

He sat down again in the arm-chair ; but the pleasant drift of his thoughts had been rudely interrupted, and he could not gather up the threads and weave them in. It was the first time in his life any member of his family had dared to oppose him.



## CHAPTER XII.

**S**EVERAL days passed, and Angus did not come again to Fulham.

One night, at the end of a week or ten days, his mother got a note from him, saying:

“I am going abroad, I start to-morrow. I don’t know how long I may be away, but don’t be anxious about me.”

Jeanette’s engagement, and the preparations for the marriage, which was to take place at once, had occupied Mrs. Macpherson’s mind so completely, that the fact of Angus staying away from home a little longer than usual had hardly been noticed.

The note rather puzzled her, for she

knew Angus ought not to be absent from his work in the busy season ; so she sent it down to her husband, who generally passed his evenings away from the family circle, in the seclusion of his own library.

Mr. Macpherson read the few lines over twice or three times.

“I will go myself and see him to-morrow,” he thought. “I must see him before he goes. I must, if possible, prevent his going.”

The next morning he had breakfast a little earlier than usual. Jeanette made it, and waited on him. It was one of her dutiful attentions to her father always, summer and winter, being down to give him his breakfast, which he had generally finished before any other members of the family, excepting Jeanette, were stirring.

Jeanette poured out the tea, passed him the different dishes, saw that he wanted

for nothing, and was ready to talk or be silent, as her father seemed inclined.

There was no doubt that Mr. Macpherson would miss Jeanette. She was not handsome. Her hair was too red, her eyes too colourless, her cheek-bones too high ; but she had a tall, commanding figure, with a quiet dignity in all her movements, that had something restful in them. She did not dress like a girl, but wore heavy, handsome clothes, silks, cashmeres, or velvets, and was in all respects a capable, managing woman, and perfectly fitted to rule the moneyed establishment of the Aberdeen merchant.

Mr. Macpherson was unusually silent that morning. His mind was occupied with the thought of that coming interview with his son. It had kept him awake a greater part of the night. He felt his son's future rested in his hands ; that he had made himself the arbitrator of his destiny ;

yet he was a little puzzled how to act for the best.

After he had drunk his second cup of tea, and pushed the cup away, Jeanette cut and handed him the *Times*.

He glanced at the money article first, because it was the habit of years, an almost involuntary act; then he folded it up ready to read as he drove up to town. He did the same with the supplement, and, as he did it, his eyes rested on the column of births, deaths, and marriages.

Mr. Macpherson sat for a moment quite still, like a man who has received some great shock; then, with a shaking hand, he gathered up the papers and left the room.

His brougham was at the door, and his daughter Ella came flying downstairs; she generally managed to give him a kiss just as he was leaving the house.

He put her aside almost roughly. In his repressed excitement he could attend to nothing.

The girl looked wonderingly into his white face, which had, she thought, an unusual expression on it.

"What has happened, papa?" she asked, timidly.

"Nothing, dear; nothing," and Mr. Macpherson went quickly out, and got into his carriage.

Supposing he were too late. Supposing Angus had already started.

Angus was seated at his writing table in his chambers in the Temple when his father opened the door and walked in. The room showed evident signs of preparations for a departure; a portmanteau ready strapped, together with a roll of rugs, stood in the corner. Angus was busy writing, with papers and letters scattered all about him.

He looked up quickly on his father's entrance.

"I have something to say to you," Mr. Macpherson explained, hurriedly; "you wrote a note to your mother last night, to tell her you were going abroad."

"Yes; I start in an hour."

"You must not go, Angus; at all events, till you have read this," Mr. Macpherson continued, and he placed the supplement of the *Times* before his son, laying his finger on a particular line.

And Angus read—

"At Munich, by the Rev. William Stanton, English chaplain, George Vere Barrington, of Rozelle Manor, in the County of Hampshire, to Esther, only daughter of the late Arthur Cumberland."

Mr. Macpherson did not wait. He



crept out of the room, and closed the door behind him.

He knew the blow would be hard. He could not regret it, but he shrank from seeing it fall.



### CHAPTER XIII.

**T**HE morning following her wedding day, Esther was awakened by Pauline bringing her her usual cup of chocolate. She sat up in bed, and held out her hand to take it, when her eyes fell upon her wedding ring.

“It is not true, Pauline,” she said; “tell me that I dreamt it.”

“Hush!” Pauline replied. “It is not lucky to let tears fall upon a wedding ring.”

Esther laid her head upon Pauline’s shoulder, and sobbed.

“I wish I were dead, Pauline! I wish I were dead!”

She did not know, poor child, fortunately, she was never to know, how

very near her happiness had been to her, that she had only just missed it.

She heard her mother's voice calling her, so she brushed away her tears, got up, and dressing hurriedly, went to her.

She sat quietly by her all that day, and many following days, for Mrs. Cumberland was now too weak to get up.

It was only the over-excitement, Esther hoped. When she had rallied from that, she might, now her mind was rested, grow strong again. She imagined the joy of taking her to England. She had sacrificed her own happiness to buy her mother's; the thought that the sacrifice had been made in vain was too hard to bear.

"You will get better, mother darling," she would whisper, kneeling by her mother, and holding both her hands; "the change to England, by very easy stages, will cure you."

"I have provided for my child, at all events," Mrs. Cumberland would say, looking wistfully into Esther's sad, young face. "Thank God, Esther, you will never know what it is to struggle, as I have done; you will never be poor, and neglected; you will go to England, and live there in your husband's beautiful home."

"We shall go together, mother," Esther would urge, and she would bring the pictures of Rozelle, and spread them upon the bed.

Mr. Barrington came and went much as he had done before, only he came oftener and remained longer. Mrs. Cumberland liked him to be with them, and Esther no longer had any right to object.

He was untiring in his desire to gratify Esther, and showed it by surrounding her mother with all those luxuries that

money could procure, but which had come too late to be of any use. Mrs. Cumberland would never lie on the easy chairs, the spring couches; she would never leave her bed.

"Not to-day, Esther," she would say when Esther wanted her to do anything. "Perhaps to-morrow," but that to-morrow never came.

One day when Mr. Barrington came, Esther was alone in the sitting-room. He had not seen her, except with her mother, since their marriage.

"Esther, my darling," he said, and he drew her to him, and for a minute held her there by force, as he kissed her lips. "I find it difficult sometimes to realize that you are indeed my wife. If you only knew what you were to me, how I long never to part from you!"

Esther drew herself away, and went to the window.

Mr. Barrington remained standing where he was, a pained expression on his pale face.

Presently Esther came back, and held out her hand.

"You must forgive me," she said, with a little sob, "for I am so unhappy; and you must have patience with me. I cannot think of anything now but my grief."

And she went back to her mother's room.

Esther had only been married a week when it became evident to everyone, but her, that Mrs. Cumberland was dying; that Mr. Barrington would have but a short time to wait before he might claim his bride; that the little flame of life that stood between him and the realization of his happiness had nearly flickered out. Esther too, saw it at last; perhaps she read the verdict written on Dr. Müller's face. In her desolation, Mr. Barrington's

presence became a comfort ; for in sorrow a woman must cling to some human support. In a silent, unobtrusive way, Mr. Barrington watched over Esther, and Esther was grateful for his kindness. It was her first experience of death, and the coming of the king of terrors appalled her.

One night, seeing she was utterly worn out, Pauline persuaded her to lie down in her own little room, promising to call her at once if Mrs. Cumberland asked for her, and Esther very unwillingly obeyed.

Pauline remained alone with her mistress. For some hours Mrs. Cumberland had been apparently unconscious ; but it was possible, Doctor Müller said, that just before the last she might rally again.

Pauline turned the lamp down, and sat by the fire. The hours went slowly by ; everything was intensely still, the silence

broken only by the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece. Pauline at last fell into a state of half-unconsciousness, from which she was startled by hearing herself called, almost loudly, by name:

“*Pauline!*”

Mrs. Cumberland had partly risen in bed; one hand was extended to draw aside the curtain, and her eyes were wide open, with an expression of anxious inquiry in them.

“Has he come, Pauline?” she asked, in a quick, nervous whisper.

Pauline crept softly across the room, and stood by the bed.

She thought her mistress was delirious.

“Has who come?” she said, soothingly.

“*Angus!*”

Pauline shivered.

“No one has come,” she replied.

Mrs. Cumberland’s head sank back again upon the pillows.



“It must have been a dream, Pauline,” she murmured, “but I fancied it was real. I thought I was lying under the chestnut tree at Villedieu, and that I heard his voice. ‘I am coming,’ he said, quite distinctly, ‘and you promised Esther was to wait for me.’”

“Perhaps, Pauline,” she added, after a pause, “if I had waited a little longer all would have come right; I think I see it clearer now; but I did it for the best. I sacrificed my child because I had no faith—no faith——”

She repeated these words with a pitiful, wailing cry, then her eyes closed, and Pauline thought she slept; but the mind was still active, though the body was so feeble.

“Pauline,” she said, presently, again opening her eyes, and fixing them imploringly on Pauline’s face, “I want you to promise, whatever happens, that you will never desert my child.”

"I promise," Pauline said.

"Never leave her Pauline, as long as you live."

"Never," Pauline repeated again, solemnly.

Mrs. Cumberland's hand sought Pauline's, and closed over it. It was the silent sealing of a bond.

The following day the blinds were down in one of the houses in the Karl Strasse. Mrs. Cumberland was dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Barrington did not take his wife back at once to Hampshire; perhaps he thought distraction would be better for her mind than the quiet of Rozelle, so he and Esther with old Pauline spend the winter in Italy.

## CHAPTER XIV.

**M**R. BARRINGTON'S devotion to his young wife, if anything, increased. No matter how full Rozelle was of guests, he never seemed to lose sight of her; and if he was not near her, his eyes followed her everywhere.

The great passion of his life had certainly come to him at forty-five.

If anything could be wanting to crown his happiness, that was granted also.

In the spring following his return to England, it was announced to him that an heir was expected.

There was no talk of its being anything but an heir, and preparations were made accordingly; nurseries were fitted up,

attendants engaged, and a dainty wardrobe sent for from London.

Down in the little Rozelle village a talk was already made about the christening, and all that would be got out of it. She was much liked down in the village, the young chatelaine of the Manor. She came among them a few days after her arrival, and no matter what her other engagements might be, she never afterwards neglected them.

Dressed in a simple, white, morning dress, and followed by old Pauline carrying a basket on her arm, she went from house to house among the poor people, as she had been used to do in France. She listened patiently to their complaints, promised their cottages should be repaired, took their babies tenderly in her arms, and sat by sick beds, a world of sympathy in her lovely blue eyes. They had only to tell their grievances, these cottagers, to work

upon her pity, to get all they wanted, food, fire-wood, clothes.

In the spring-time just when the lilies were in perfect blossom, when soft showers left sparkling drops of crystal on the tender opening leaves, when all nature was most beautiful, a little girl was born at Rozelle Manor.

It was a great disappointment to Mr. Barrington. He had become fond of Rozelle, and the thought of someone belonging to him carrying on the name had grown upon him day by day. The little girl would be the heiress, for the estate was entailed in the female, as well as in the male line, but it was not the same thing. The name, if she married, which for generations had belonged to the place, would know it no more.

Mrs. Barrington was disappointed, because she knew her husband's wishes ; but it was for his sake, not her own. When

they laid the little infant in her arms, a new expression—a rapture of love—such as you only see in mother's faces, came into hers.

Her tears fell upon the little waxen face. It was the beginning of another era. In the silence of the night, when no one was watching her, her prayers were whispered over it. The child God had sent her to fill up the blank in her life.

For a few weeks all went well. At the supreme moment of danger, when Mr. Barrington feared his young wife might be taken from him, his desire for an heir faded into insignificance—and something of this feeling yet remained. So long as he had Esther, the world, life, was full of satisfaction.

Just as Esther began to recover her strength, and was able to lie on the sofa at the open window, or sit on the terrace, looking more ethereally lovely than ever, the doctors and nurses began to whisper mys-

teriously together. Once or twice they stopped abruptly on seeing her, and at such times the child was carried quietly away, or the subject of conversation changed. Esther's fears were at last aroused, but she saw nothing to justify them. The child was unusually small, but perfectly made. It had its mother's delicate little oval face, but dark eyes, like the pictures of all the Barringtons. It seemed to thrive, and lay sweetly sleeping in her caressing arms.

At last the family doctor desired a private interview with Mr. Barrington. They went into the library together, and the door was closed.

The man of science felt he had undertaken a hard task ; but it was over at last, and he had broken to the father, as gently and considerately as he could, the dreadful certainty that the little heiress of Rozelle Manor had been born both *deaf* and *dumb*.

It was a crushing blow. At first Mr. Barrington refused to believe it, and physicians were called in for consultations; but the result was only a confirmation of their worst fears. There was no hope, humanly speaking, of a cure being at any time possible.

Esther had to be told. With a little cry of agony, she ran to the cradle where her child was sleeping, took it in her arms, and with a passionate caress rocked it to and fro.

It was ten times dearer to her now than it had ever been before.

With Mr. Barrington the case was different. He shrank from seeing his little daughter. When he came into the room, if she was lying on Esther's lap, he would ring the bell, and send her away, on the plea that Esther was tiring herself.

Gradually Esther recognised this, and by a mutual understanding with Pauline, things



were so managed that her child was only with her when her husband was absent. The big nurseries were shut up, the grand nurses were dismissed, and Pauline had the sole charge of the little heiress.

Old Pauline was a most devoted nurse. For hours at a stretch she would walk up and down, carrying the infant in her arms, and singing to her the old French nursery songs she had sung to Esther, just as if she too could hear. She knew she could not, but it was habit; with a baby in her arms, the singing came by instinct. They had rooms to themselves in a separate wing of the house, and there Esther spent every moment she was allowed to pass away from her husband.

There was no grand christening, such as the villagers had once anticipated.

Old Pauline carried the baby to church through the lilac walk; and there, very quietly, she received the name of Lucille.

Mr. Barrington, as time went on, did not go out or receive as many people as formerly. He shrank from pity. He had talked of his heir, and he dreaded the mentioning of his little afflicted daughter.

With Esther it was different. She took her child among the poor people, and their natural refinement kept them from speaking of its misfortunes, and made them praise its looks. They called down blessings on its little head, and Esther's heart drank in eagerly the healing words.

Day by day, and week by week, little Lucille grew stronger. There seemed no chance that death would take her away; nor was there, as time passed, any idea of another child coming to take her place.

She remained the heiress of Rozelle.

Tiny in frame, with a sweet, serious expression in her great, luminous, dark eyes, that seemed as if her soul were shining in them, eyes that never smiled, but looked

into her mother's with an *en rapport* that made the communication between them as clear as speech, Lucille was backward in nothing except that she could not speak or hear. Her quick intelligence, fostered by the tender care of her mother and old Pauline, made her at two years old seem to casual observers much like other children; except that her expression was so unchild-like in its pathos.

When Lucille was three years old, it so happened that Mr. Barrington had an imperative call to Paris. He went very unwillingly; but the nature of the business was such that it required his personal attention. He did not care to take Esther, and she did not wish to go. Ten days, a fortnight at most, and he would be back again.

The night before he started he and Esther walked up and down upon the terrace which overlooked the mere. It

was a lovely summer night, and as gradually the opaline tints faded in the west, the moon rose, and its silver light rested on the lilies and the little ripples of water running in between them.

It was a night that spoke of peace, of rest, and eternity; a night never in after years to be forgotten. Mr. Barrington's mind travelled back to the heated life in Paris. How was it possible he had ever cared for it when anything so sweet and pure as this was waiting for him! How wearisome now, in retrospect, were the nights at the theatres, the suppers after the opera at the Trois Frères, or in the Palais Royal, the garish lights, the music, the dancing, the laughter!

What woman's face had been as lovely as Esther's?—Esther in her pure young beauty!

He held her hand as they sauntered slowly backwards and forwards. It was a

way he had. His mind was full of her, and she—she was thinking of Lucille.

The following day Mr. Barrington went away, and Esther was left alone with her child.

After her mother's death Angus' name had never passed Esther's lips, even to old Pauline. She tried to do her duty without looking back. She had prayed that she might be able to put away her love, and *God had given her Lucille*. Alone with Lucille, she was happy.

That morning little ripples of laughter even came from her lips, as she ran to the nursery and fetched her darling. They settled to have a long morning together, she and Pauline. It was almost as if they were back at Villedieu, for they sat under the spreading sycamore trees in the park and had their lunch carried out to them there. Esther made daisy chains for Lucille, and, going to the edge of the mere,

drew in some water lilies, and crowned her with them as she sat upon the grass.

Then she hushed her in her arms till she fell asleep.

Presently, when the great heat of the July day was gone, she took her up and went with her to the village. She was always happy with the poor, and when she could, she liked to share her joys with them. Pauline, as usual, followed with a basket.

There were some outlying cottages down by a now disused old water mill, and the mother of a poor family living in one of what used to be called the Mill cottages, Esther heard, had been ailing, so she decided to go there and enquire after her.

They went across a meadow starred with daisies and bright with golden buttercups. The old mill stream came rushing down over a heap of stones, then glided silently away, scarcely seeming to move, that little

turbulent outbreak over. The stream was crossed by a bridge—a plank with a broken rail. Esther, with Lucille in her arms, ran lightly over it, leaving Pauline, with her heavy basket, to follow more carefully.

Esther turned her head, and smiled brightly back at the old Frenchwoman, who stood resting on the opposite bank.

Everything, every little detail of her life that morning was full of gladness; she fancied herself a girl once more. She knocked at the broken, shabby door of the little cottage, but as no one answered, she lifted the latch, and went softly in.

A clock was ticking loudly, but the only occupant of the room was a child not much older than Lucille. She was lying on a truckle bed, her bare arms thrown outside the patchwork coverlet, her breath coming short and quick, whilst two crimson fever spots burned on her little cheeks.

Esther drew back, and unconsciously clasped Lucille more closely in her arms. A moment after, and the mother hurried in from the garden at the back.

“What is the matter with her?” Esther asked, her voice shaking a little as she spoke.

“It’s some sort of fever—the Lord have mercy on us; but how we are to pay for a doctor, He only knows.”

“I will pay him,” Esther said, quickly; and yet she lingered, so afraid was she of wounding the woman’s feelings by expressing any fears.

Old Pauline had now come in unobserved.

She put the basket down on the table, then she drew near the bed, and looked at the child.

A cry of horror escaped her lips; she seized Esther by the arm, and almost dragged her outside. She could speak English fairly well now, but when she was excited



she always relapsed into the use of her mother tongue. She poured out a volley of words; she threw up her hands with a gesture of despair.

Esther burst into tears.

“Don’t tell me, Pauline,” she exclaimed, “that there was any risk, any danger for Lucille !”

Pauline did not answer ; she took Lucille, who was still holding some buttercups tightly clasped in her tiny hand, and carried her swiftly back over the little bridge, never stopping till she reached the long, shady lane they had come up so short a time before.

Esther followed with a face as white as death. She realized it all.

The very air was poisoned.

Ah ! what days and nights of sickening fear followed for poor Esther ! How fervently she prayed her child might escape, that the evil might be averted, but it was

not to be. No one but old Pauline knew what she suffered ; the happy days of only a short week ago seemed already far away in the past.

When Lucille was awake, Esther would take her on to the terrace, or out into the garden, cover her with flowers, and smile into her face as only a mother can smile ; but when the night fell, and Lucille was tenderly laid in her little cot, Esther would put her arms round old Pauline's neck and whisper between her sobs :

"I have not hurt my darling, have I, Pauline ? Tell me she is safe, that she won't be taken from me."

It was a very miserable time for old Pauline ; she tried to comfort Esther, but she could not keep from her the sad fact that the little girl at the Mill cottage was dead. Esther had lived so much among the poor people down in the Rozelle village, that when they were in any trouble they

sent at once to let her know. The fever was spreading ; the soft west winds were full of poisonous malaria ; summer breezes that never seemed to cool the air.

Esther was not unprepared ; she had from the very first moment dreaded the worst.



## CHAPTER XV.

**H**UCILLE sickened. She gave up playing with her toys and flowers, and crept into her mother's arms, and laid her head upon her breast. The fever spots came into her cheeks, as they had done into those of the child at the Mill cottage. She went to the very gates of death, to the borders of the debateable land; but those golden gates that open to take in so many wandering little feet did not open for hers.

Day and night Esther and old Pauline prayed and hoped—and hoped and prayed. Pauline brought down Angus' crucifix, and knelt before it, crossing herself, and rocking to and fro in her great misery.

Esther knelt by her child's bed, her face

white as death, but her lips silent with a dumb despair.

At last the fever turned, and the doctors said Lucille might possibly recover. Still, Esther never gave way. She would take no rest. She was always beside her darling, holding the little wasted hands, or giving food and medicine ; always ready, with a smile, to put her arms for a support round the little frail body, or lay tender kisses on the dry, hot lips.

There was no telegraph to France in those days ; no possibility of sending immediately for Mr. Barrington ; his whereabouts even was uncertain ; but in her supreme moment of agony, Esther did not need his presence. He had never cared for Lucille. She was perhaps glad to be alone—glad he was not there to take her from her child.

The very day Lucille was declared out of danger, Esther fell ill. It was fatigue, she said—only fatigue—a natural reaction.

She had been so devoted in her constant attendance upon Lucille, that she was worn out and wanted rest.

A few days passed ; the doctors looked grave, and finally pronounced it fever.

Mr. Armstrong, the steward, started at once for France, to find his master. The village women hung about in little groups ; there was a panic everywhere. Till now no one had realized how entirely the lady of the Manor had won the hearts of her poor people. She had caught the fever from going among them, and they wrung their toil-worn hands, and wept as they thought of her being taken from them—the good angel God had sent them.

Mr. Armstrong went straight to Paris to look for Mr. Barrington. He could not speak a word of French, and the great capital bewildered him. He had one or two addresses, but his master was not for the time being at any of these places. He

began to be in despair. The loss of every hour was fatal.

He was trying to make up his mind what steps he ought to take, when, walking slowly down the Champs Elysées into the Rue Rivoli, he met Mr. Barrington face to face.

It was one of those strange coincidences that are so constantly occurring. Mr. Barrington was talking to another man, and they paused as they discussed their subject. The steward waited for a minute, then he went forward and touched his master on the arm.

It would be impossible to describe the expression on the faces of the two men as they looked at each other. In his great love for Esther, before a word was spoken, Mr. Barrington's mind grasped the truth.

"She is dead?" he said, hoarsely:

He did not think of his child; no one but his wife.

"No, not dead," the steward faltered,

“only very ill ; so ill that you are wanted home at once.”

And then he told him all.

Mr. Barrington did not speak. Globes of light were shining in the Champs Elysées, against the deep blue sky of a summer night. Above the Place de la Concorde, the Arc de Triomphe rose grandly beautiful. There was a ball at the Palace of the Tuileries, and the whole building was illuminated. The air seemed full of distant music ; the rush and whirl of many carriages ; a very babel of sounds ; a tide of life ; and yet, *Esther was dying*.

He had no hope ; he had been thinking of her—thinking how empty Paris was for him because she was not there. But above and beyond the sense of emptiness had always risen the memory of her sweet, haunting face ; the assurance that he was going back to her.



There would be a race now between him and death.

With a moan of anguish, he leant upon the steward's arm, and they went back to Meurices' Hotel. Mr. Barrington was dazed and helpless; but now that Mr. Armstrong had found his master, he was equal to the occasion. As he had no valet with him, he gathered up his things, packed the portmanteau, paid the bill, and an hour later they were flying to Boulogne to catch the tidal boat.

The moon was shining on the water as they went alongside the quay. All was bustle, hurry and confusion on board the little steamer; some people had missed their luggage, or forgotten something; others were saying good-bye to friends; everyone was wrapped up in their own interests—for so the world goes on, though aching hearts are beating so near our own.

Mr. Barrington remained on deck, and

the steward remained with him. He was afraid to leave him, there was such a set look of despair on his white face. He had enquired every particular in the train, and after that he hardly spoke, but sat with his arms folded and his head drooped upon his breast.

Just as the day broke the white cliffs of England rose before them.

They were nearing home.

At Folkestone the express train met the boat, and London was reached without any unnecessary loss of time. They drove through the busy, crowded streets without stopping, and took the first train leaving for Southampton.

Mr. Barrington would eat nothing, each moment the suspense, the tension became greater. He never allowed himself from the first to hope Esther would live; he only prayed to see her, to kiss her once again before she died.

A carriage, with a relay of horses, was waiting at Southampton ; there was no delay anywhere.

As they paused at the lodge entering the poplar avenue, and whilst the big iron gates were being opened, it was the steward who asked the news of Mrs. Barrington.

“She was alive,” the woman answered, but the doctors had given up hope, and that was all she knew.

Rozelle Manor was lighted up by a brilliant afternoon sun, which made the many windows look like burnished gold.

The rooks were cawing contentedly among the branches of the trees. Esther, standing in the doorway, with her white dress, alone was wanting to complete the picture that had been before Mr. Barrington’s mental vision ever since he left England ; and no Esther was there.

The doctor, who had seen the car-

riage coming, met Mr. Barrington in the hall.

Yes, it was true—there was no hope. She was sinking rapidly. The fever had been too much for her wasted strength. She was conscious—just conscious—and that was all.

Mr. Barrington followed him upstairs like a man in a dream, and went softly into Esther's room.

The fever had left her, and she was lying on the bed as white as a virgin lily, with the impress of coming death upon her face. An attendant was on one side, and at the foot of the bed stood old Pauline, with Lucille in her arms.

After the noise, the bustle, the excitement of the hurried journey from Paris, the whole scene was one of intense repose. The window curtains were partly drawn, but a sweet scent of summer air, laden with the perfume of flowers, the hum of

birds and insects, came in from the open window.

Mr. Barrington advanced gently, and knelt beside the bed.

“Esther,” he whispered. “Oh, my darling! look at me—speak to me—only once!”

A slight moan came from the white lips.

“Esther,” he continued, passionately, “I cannot live without you. Oh, my beloved, don’t leave me!”

Esther opened her eyes—the lovely blue eyes over which the haze of death was already gathering. For a moment they rested with an anxious, wistful expression on Mr. Barrington’s face, then they turned and sought Lucille.

With a huge effort she seemed to try and rouse herself; a look of almost piteous entreaty came into her eyes, as once more she turned them to her husband. Her lips moved, as though in the endeavour to frame

some request; but the inexorable messenger of death would not tarry. He laid his icy hands upon her lips, and the words remained for ever unspoken. .



## CHAPTER XVI.

**N**OW Mr. Barrington bore his grief no one ever knew. He remained for hours in Esther's room, and then he locked himself into his own, where no one was admitted except his personal attendant.

The days that passed between Esther's death and her funeral left a mark upon him never to be effaced. He had aged ten years. He sought no sympathy; he gave way to no visible emotion. He saw all that remained of the wife he had loved so passionately laid in the family vault, with a calmness of bearing that amounted to rigidity, and the following morning he left Rozelle.

When his intention of leaving the Manor became known, Mr. Armstrong tried to

speak to him about the house and the servants; he desired to receive his orders generally, but Mr. Barrington would not listen. Old Pauline, with Lucille in her arms, waylaid him on the stairs.

“What was she to do with his child—the little heiress?”

He put her aside. He would write. They should all receive full instructions. He could not bear the child now; he looked upon her as the instrument of Esther's death.

Old Pauline clasped her in her arms—the little unconscious orphan, whose eyes were for ever seeking the familiar face of her dead mother.

Mr. Barrington was as good as his word. The steward received his instructions. All the servants were to be dismissed, the horses and carriages sold, the Manor shut up, and looked after, as before, by a man and his wife from the village. Old Pauline



and Lucille were to live in a wing of it, Pauline keeping a servant to help her ; and the money for their expenses would be forwarded at regular intervals.

So once more Rozelle manor was shut up, and its owner had gone no one knew where.

It was quite touching to watch old Pauline's devotion to Lucille. All the long summer days she was to be seen wandering about the Park with the child running by her side, or carried in her arms, or playing with her under the shade of one of the big trees. She was a true Frenchwoman, in that she liked to live out of doors. With always a bit of knitting, or embroidery in her hand, she would spread a shawl for Lucille, and then sit, crouched up against the friendly support of the great gnarled trunk, singing her little nursery songs in Norman *patois*.

There grew to be a most perfect under-

standing between her and the child. Little Lucille knew what every motion of her lips meant, and answered through her dark eyes. Pauline was fearfully jealous over her charge, and resented any semblance of interference.

Had not her mistress, when dying, confided her to her care? Had not her master given her undivided authority over Lucille? Mrs. Chapman, the vicar's wife, sometimes, as a matter of duty, came to see her, and old Pauline would receive her with great stiffness and ceremony, and even listen to her advice and suggestions in respectful silence; but she never followed them.

Who was likely to know as well as she did what was good for the child? Who cared for her as she did?

She never left her except on Sundays, when she went to church. The little Roman Catholic chapel was two miles off, and she always walked there and back,

in the very early morning, for the first mass, almost before anyone else was stirring.

Once she took Lucille with her ; and the Vicar's wife hearing of it, came to the Manor and remonstrated with Pauline. The remonstrance would not have hindered her from taking the child again, had she chosen ; but Mrs. Chapman hinted at writing to Mr. Barrington, and the fear that she might be separated from her darling made Pauline leave her for that short time under the care of Joan, the girl whom Pauline had engaged when the other servants were dismissed.

When Lucille was five years old, Mrs. Chapman thought she ought to go to church ; so Pauline took her. She put her in the Manor pew, where she sat all alone, her little serious face thrown out in strong relief against the dark red cloth, her wonderful eyes fixed upon the Vicar's face,

just as though she could hear what he was saying.

Old Pauline always brought her and waited outside, in the churchyard, and they went home together through the lych-gate and the lilac walk.

Things drifted on in this uneventful way for six years; then a great change came. Mr. Barrington had never returned to Rozelle, even for a day; at last no one expected him; he was almost forgotten, when the startling news arrived that he was coming once more to live at the Manor, and that he would bring his second wife with him.

Hardly anyone is faithful to a memory, and everyone, more or less, rejoiced over the event; even the village people, who had so warmly appreciated Esther, were openly glad to hear of the coming of a new chatelaine. It meant soup, milk, and extra comforts.

Only Pauline was angry. Bitterly in her heart did she resent that anyone should take her darling's place, and have authority over Lucille.

It was not such a quiet coming home as the first bride's had been. Great cases arrived; new furniture, statuary, bric-à-brac. Carts were constantly meeting the trains—the railway being now within a mile from Rozelle—importing these *avant-couriers*; and at last Mr. and Mrs. Barrington arrived also.

Carriages met them at the station, and they drove home through the village, just as Esther had done; only, as they were close carriages, not much could be seen beyond wraps and luggage.

It was the middle of the week when they arrived, and the new Mrs. Barrington did not leave the Manor till Sunday. On Sunday morning she went to church. She drove in an open carriage, and Mr. Barrington

ton sat beside her. He helped her to alight at the church gate, and she swept up the path and through the aisle into the chancel, dressed in a silk and velvet costume, and leaving a faint aroma of ottar of roses behind her as she went. A fine woman, not less than thirty-eight, with dark eyes and complexion, that some might have thought Spanish ; but which to many suggested colour blood. She looked a woman whose will it would not be easy to dispute ; a woman born to command.

Mr. Barrington looked twenty years older than he had done when he married Esther ; and there was no expression of love in his eyes when he turned them on his new wife. He was perfectly courteous in his manner, but all through the service his mind was evidently absent and absorbed.

Lucille that Sunday was not taken to church.

Mrs. Barrington drove back to the

Manor as she had come. High-stepping grey horses were pawing the ground at the big entrance to the churchyard, when, with a gracious bend of her head to the curtseying villagers, she swept back and was handed into the open landau by her husband. He did not accompany her this time. He went home alone, by the lych gate and the lilac walk.

Mrs. Barrington brought a lady's-maid with her from Paris, who always spoke of her mistress as "Madame," and Madame was the name by which she very soon became known in the village. Madame did not personally visit her people, but she had an able housekeeper, and there was a good deal of liberality shown in the donations. She did not take up the reins of government as Esther had done, with a shy, diffident grace, but with a firm, strong hand.

Her first show of power was towards

Pauline. A few days after her arrival, Pauline was desired to bring Lucille to her morning-room; not the room that had been Esther's, that was locked, and Mr. Barrington kept the key.

Muttering as she took her, Pauline unwillingly obeyed the summons. Lucille was frightened, for she had seen so few strangers; she clung to Pauline, making the little cry that any great excitement always provoked.

Madame put Pauline through a long category, and ended the interview by saying that a new form of treatment must at once be adopted; that Lucille should spend a part of every day with her, that she should drive with her, and that she would see a doctor and ascertain if it was not possible to teach her something.

It was her duty, Madame added, with the smile Pauline so soon learned to hate, to take some immediate and decided steps to



repair—if not too late—the cruel neglect with which the child had evidently been treated, and she hinted at the probability of sending her to a deaf and dumb asylum.

Old Pauline shook with rage; but she was powerless. She could not even take refuge in French, for Madame spoke it as well, if not better than she did herself.

When at last the interview was over, and she was back in her own domain, a perfect torrent of invectives burst from her lips, accompanied by gesticulations of which only a Frenchwoman is capable. But what could she do? She could only rock Lucille in her arms, fearing as she did it, that it might not be for long.



## CHAPTER XVII.

**M**ADAME'S intentions in settling at Rozelle were certainly not to shut herself up. The Manor was once more thrown open, and entertainments given on quite a magnificent scale. The new Mrs. Barrington was a charming hostess. With much tact she soon made herself acquainted with all the ins and outs of the scattered neighbourhood; knew exactly what people to invite to meet each other, and swept about among her guests dressed in perfect Parisian toilettes, with gracious words upon her smiling lips.

Mr. Barrington interfered very little, and spent most of his time in his own rooms. He apparently did not care if Hampshire admired his second wife or not; but he let her have her own way.

For some time after her arrival at Rozelle Manor, Mrs. Barrington devoted herself to arranging the house. All the great cases and boxes which had preceded her arrival were carefully unpacked, and the contents disposed of. Furnishing was evidently a passion with her ; and the scope at Rozelle, with many of the rooms in the old part of the house empty, was unlimited.

Notwithstanding Madame's many occupations, she carried out her intentions respecting Lucille. She desired her own maid to get the child some respectable frocks, and after that was accomplished, she had her brought into her room for an hour every morning.

The first day Lucille came Pauline brought her.

Poor little Lucille was dreadfully frightened, and clung to the only protector she had with a perfect agony of entreaty in her dark eyes ; but notwithstanding the little

arms could with difficulty be unclasped from round her neck, Pauline put her gently inside Madame's door, and closed it on her.

Madame came forward and took her hand. She pointed to a chair, and motioned Lucille to sit on it; and Lucille, all trembling obeyed. Then she brought out a gay little French *bonbonnière* and offered the child some sugar plums, which Lucille was too frightened to accept. After that Madame's resources seemed at an end; and she returned to her interrupted occupation—the unpacking of Roman medallions.

The hour passed away. Madame, absorbed in her work, had forgotton Lucille's existence.

Lucille never moved. Her little hands remained crossed upon her lap; only her great luminous eyes followed Mrs. Barrington's every movement.

At the end of an hour Mrs. Barrington's

maid came in, bringing a message that she was wanted in another part of the house; so, without even glancing at Lucille, she went out.

In the passage she met Pauline. The old Frenchwoman's dark, bead-like eyes were glowing like coals of fire.

The hour had been as hard for her as Lucille.

"You may take the child away," Madame said, carelessly, with a little backward motion of the hand, and then passed on without another word.

Lucille sprang into Pauline's arms, and, soothing her as she had used to do when she was a baby, Pauline carried her back to her own room.

This ordeal was repeated every day, and with much the same result.

"I am anxious to do my duty by Lucille," Madame said, loftily, to her friends, when speaking of her little step-

daughter; "she is my husband's child, is the heiress of Rozelle, and has been dreadfully neglected."

To carry out her good resolutions more completely, Madame occasionally took her out driving. Madame sat in the front seat of her large open barouche, Lucille opposite; her little pathetic face wearing an expression of helpless resignation; her eyes, through which her soul seemed always to be shining, looking out wistfully on the green fields.

Mr. Barrington saw Lucille the day after his return to Rozelle. Pauline took care of that; but he never asked for her, and he seemed to avoid the chance of meeting her. Madame soon discovered this; and the apparent interest and espionage over Lucille gradually relaxed.

Mr. Barrington had never cared for Lucille. If he had been a woman, things would have been different; a woman for

the sake of her dead, would have opened her heart to the living ; but Mr. Barrington connected her with his loss, and he shrank from his child.

Pauline began to breathe more freely.

Madame was so occupied with her friends her receptions, her toilettes from Paris, that Lucille seemed almost forgotten ; and, for a time, nothing was said about sending her away from Rozelle.

Mr. Barrington had been married about a year and a half when a son and heir was born to him ; and Lucille was deposed.

This event seemed to rouse Mr. Barrington from the apathy into which he had gradually fallen. He had wished for a son. His disappointment when Lucille came had increased the desire. He wished his name to live after him, and the fulfilment of this ambition brought as much satisfaction into his life as anything could now have the power to do.

Madame did not devote herself to her child ; it was not in her nature to do so. She was very proud of him, and her importance was greatly increased, for Lucille was no longer the heiress. Mrs. Barrington had not that place in her husband's affections his first wife had held ; but she was the mother of his son—that was always her consolation, when she thought of Esther.

The nurseries that had once been fitted for Esther's child were redecorated to receive the little heir, and a christening *fête* was arranged. Edgar was a fine, healthy boy ; not dark, like his father and mother, but having blue eyes, and hair almost as yellow as the daffodils. He developed no sickness, no weakness.

The star of prosperity seemed to have risen again on Rozelle.

The christening gathering was one of unusual splendour. No expense was spared.



The house and grounds were thrown open, and all the neighbourhood invited.

Madame was queen of the *fête*, and did the honours well. She was a handsome woman, every one agreed, and Mr. Barrington had done wisely in marrying again.

A man must have someone to manage his house, and look after his comforts; and since she had given him a son, he would have the satisfaction of knowing the name and the place would be kept together.

The day of the christening festivities rose brilliantly; a summer day without a cloud. The village people were to dine in the park at tables spread under the large sycamore trees; after that the school-children were to have their tea, followed by games; and a grand display of fireworks was to bring the entertainment to a close.

Old Pauline and little Lucille formed no part of the programme; but for all that

Pauline dressed her charge in a white frock and took her into the park. She had seen so little, poor child, so very little of the bright side of life, why should she be debarred from this pleasure.

They stood alone; Pauline did not venture into Madame's neighbourhood, for fear of being ordered into the house. There was only armed neutrality at the best, between these two; and the power was on Madame's side.

Presently the long tables prepared for the most humble of the guests were filled, and the feast began.

Mr. Barrington had been urged to take the head of the table. Mr. Armstrong told him privately it was expected of him. After the meal was over, and the smoking joints had been removed, glasses were filled, and the young heir was toasted. The speeches were rough but hearty. Dining there, in the grounds of Rozelle manor,

there seemed to be a breaking down of social barriers ; and each man and woman felt the family interest identical with their own. To add to this feeling, by Madame's desire, the young heir, gorgeous in a white satin robe covered with lace, was carried round to be admired.

He was loudly cheered. "Long might he live," a tenant farmer said, standing up, a man whose natural, though not very original, eloquence made him selected as spokesman for the party. "Long might he live, and his heirs after him, and be as much liked as his father had been."

This last remark was a concession to the occasion, for Mr. Barrington had been very hardly spoken of during all the years he had spent abroad, or at least absent from Rozelle. He stammered a little as he said it ; so, taking advantage of this, another man rose :

"That's what they have wanted, an heir

to the old property, and now they have got him, they would drink his health and prosperity."

And to fill in the pause, mugs of beer went to thirsty lips by unanimous consent.

There was something very picturesque in the scene. It was such a brilliant summer day. The sunshine was pouring a perfect flood of amber-light on everything. The church bells were ringing; flags were floating from the turrets of the Manor; scattered all about on the emerald green grass were groups of gaily-dressed people.

Never within the memory of anyone living had Rozelle worn such a holiday aspect, as it did on the day of Madame's *fête*.

Mr. Barrington rose to return thanks.

"If there was one thing more than another," he said, "which made him glad of the birth of a son, it was that when he was dead he might be able to leave his heir

the care of so many tried and faithful servants, and he hoped the bond of union would be mutual; that they in return would feel themselves bound to serve his son."

As Mr. Barrington said this he happened to glance beyond the table, and there, just in front of him, standing under a tree, his eyes rested on the little figure of Lucille. She had gone a few steps away from Pauline, and stood quite alone. Something in the pose of the white figure, the delicate outlines of the oval face, the transparent colouring, the parted lips, made Mr. Barrington start.

It was as though Esther had risen from the grave.

He had known so little of Lucille that she had no separate identity to his mind. He ceased to see the eager, hilarious faces gathered round him, the present was forgotten, and the past rose before him with unfaded distinctness.

He was once more under the linden trees at Munich, and Esther was coming to him not with a joyous willing step, but what was that? It was the token, her coming at all, that he had won her, and his pulses had throbbed with exultation.

Another turn of the kaleidoscope, and he was standing beside her, whilst they both watched by her mother's dying bed. She was giving Esther into his care with many solemn charge, sweet Esther his newly made wife.

They were dream pictures, but they had the power to sweep away the intervening years.

The steward touched him on the arm. His people were waiting for him to bid them fill their glasses.

Mr. Barrington started, then, quite mechanically, he went through the duties required of him; but as soon as it was possible he got away; the noise, the crowd,

had grown hateful to him, and he sought refuge in Esther's rooms—those locked rooms into which no one ever went but himself.

Madame was untiring in her energy. She held a little court in the garden, where the band was playing, and where the especially intimate guests were amusing themselves now the luncheon was over. Madame was not quite unsupported. A few days previous to the christening her brother had arrived. His name was Captain Darrell, and he was supposed to have served in the Austrian army. He was younger than Mrs. Barrington, and a man whom many people considered very handsome. He was not very tall, but strongly built ; and if Madame gave the impression of Spanish origin, his appearance suggested Creole blood ; but if both of them were West Indian, it was never hinted at.

Captain Darrell had large dark eyes,

regular features, and very white teeth. His hair was almost black, and when he smiled beneath his long moustache, the smile had something cruel in it.

His sister appeared fond of him, and at all events a perfectly good understanding existed between them. He made himself both useful and pleasant to Madame's guests, seeming quite at home at the Manor.

When evening came, there was dancing in the big Hall, and supper for all who chose to go in and partake of it. Lights were blazing from every window, strains of music came floating on the air, mingled with the hum of voices and merry laughter.

Later came fireworks, and under cover of the darkness, Pauline and Lucille crept up upon the terracé.

Pauline was a thorough Frenchwoman. A *fête* was her idea of earthly happiness. She clapped her hands, running hither and



thither, as if she had been a child. Lucille followed, awestruck and a little frightened.

When it was all over, and night and gloom had settled upon the enchanted scene, Lucille, in her little bed, still fancied she could see the golden showers, the revolving wheels. To her the noise and shouting had been nothing. It was only a sea of upturned faces with silent lips on which the changing lights were thrown. But even when at last her eyes had closed in sleep she dreamt of falling stars.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

**T**HE coming of the little heir was like a ray of sunshine in Lucille's life. She did not go and play with him in his grand nurseries. Madame was very particular, and did not allow it ; but when he was out walking, his nurse would join Pauline, and Lucille would watch him, or lay her little hand on his to touch it.

As he grew older and could toddle about alone, she made him balls of buttercups, and daisy chains, and watched and waited for him with the wistful expression in her eyes.

There was a little coppice of beech trees on a sloping upland of the park. It had always been a favourite resort of Pauline's

in the summer days, and here his nurse also brought little Edgar. Pauline dearly loved a good gossip, and, though she knitted hard all the time, the needles flashing like mimic swords, she liked to talk. So it came about that Lucille often had the entire care of her little step-brother for hours together, whilst the two women chatted under the shade of the trees.

Lucille was infinitely tender over her charge, and he would run to her with outstretched arms directly he saw her coming. It was curious when he learnt to speak, how he tried to talk to her, so as to make her answer.

He would put his little arms round her neck, then draw her face down to his, and so tell her what he had to say ; then wait and listen for an answer. But it was more wonderful still how soon he learnt to understand Lucille was different from other

people, and how complete an alphabet of signs they had between them.

Those were happy days for Lucille, and no one saw the dark cloud that was coming.

The second Mrs. Barrington had no intention of letting her affection for her child debar her from enjoying the pleasures of the world. She visited a great deal, spent the spring in London; the autumn at the sea-side or abroad. Sometimes Mr. Barrington accompanied her, but though he was also very often absent from Rozelle, he was not always with his wife. Captain Darrell more generally went with her, and he was also very constant in his visits to the Manor.

Little Edgar was now two years old. It was summer time, and it so happened that both Mr. and Mrs. Barrington were at Rozelle. The weather was extremely sultry, and the young heir had been kept in doors during a long day. When the shadows

began to fall, his nurse dressed him ready to go out.

He wanted to go to Lucille. He had been fretting and crying for Lucille. Old Pauline and Lucille, according to their usual custom, spent the hottest days under a spreading tree. A house always stifled the old Frenchwoman; but Madame's orders were strict about her son; she did not want his lovely blond complexion spoilt by being tanned. Madame was lying in an arm-chair by the open window of her luxuriously furnished morning room. She had taken up a book, but she was not reading. A soft hum of bees, the occasional note of a bird alone broke the stillness; and her mind became absorbed in her own reflections.

Life had been very successful for the last few years, and she was planning the future. Mr. Barrington was delicate; he was an old man for his age; but when he

died she would be the guardian of his son. The power for many years would rest in her hands, and she arranged how she would use it.

Presently, a wild cry for help rang through the house.

Mrs. Barrington started up; she knew that something dreadful must have happened—something, she expected, to Lucille.

There was a rush, a panic, then the truth was known—the awful truth.

The nurse had taken little Edgar out upon the terrace; she had forgotten her sunshade, so she told him to wait where he was, and mind not to stir till her return, then she left him.

He remained perfectly still for a minute after she had gone; then he thought he saw Lucille. He did not pause a second, but ran down the slope.

The mere, completely covered by the lilies, now in all their summer glory, lay

between him and what he wanted. The great fan-like leaves completely hid the water. It seemed to him only a bright green garden. His little feet never slackened, with arms uplifted, and a shout of joy upon his lips, he ran straight on.

It was his nurse who gave that cry; but she did not even try to save him—she was paralyzed by fear.

When help came, it was too late. They brought him out of the water, the lilies tangled among his golden curls; but he was dead. His brief life had ended, and Lucille was once again the heiress of Rozelle.

People spoke of the old Manor now in awestruck whispers. Surely there was a curse upon it; a curse upon its inheritance, at all events.

Mr. and Mrs. Barrington left Hampshire immediately after the funeral. Mrs. Barrington felt her son's death bitterly; the

glory had departed from her, her airy castles had crumbled into dust. She was no longer the mother of the heir.

Lucille's grief for her little brother was very touching. She would cling to Pauline with her arms round her neck, a frightened expression on her face, and a whole world of enquiry in her tender dark eyes.

For reply, Pauline would rock her, and point to the churchyard ; but she could not make her understand the mystery of death, or that her little brother was lying there, and never coming back again.

For years Lucille was always expecting him, waiting, watching and searching for him. She would look behind the trees in the back wood—among the tall shrubs and flowers in the garden—everywhere—and though each day brought disappointment, on the following her labours were renewed by hope.

Time passed on. People said that Mrs.



Barrington continued to feel her child's death so terribly that she did not care to return to Rozelle. Neither did Mr. Barrington; consequently nothing was done about Lucille's neglected education, and old Pauline had the entire charge of her, and as far as she knew conscientiously fulfilled her trust and did her duty.

Lucille went regularly to church, and Pauline taught her to do French embroidery, and raised flowers on silk or satin, such as Esther had been taught to work at the convent; but that was all. Lucille grew very beautiful; the expression of her eyes deepened into a velvet softness—the beautiful luminous eyes that more than ever looked as if the soul was shining through them. She was tall and slight, with the same delicate oval face, and transparent colouring that reminded people of her mother, and she had the same pathetic expression on the sweet, curved lips.

It was a curious life she led for so young a girl—living all alone in the weird old Manor House, with only a French *bonne* for a companion; but it was not unhappy, for Lucille had known no other. A conscious life that was worth living had never stirred her breast. She was happy as the birds are happy, because the sun shone, the air was sweet, and the flowers were bright. She lay in her little bed at night, and watched the stars shining in the sky. What she thought about no one knew. Her inner life was hid from every one but God, because her thoughts could find no outlet in words.

When Lucille was sixteen, Mrs. Barrington returned to Rozelle. She was a widow. Mr. Barrington had died abroad, and, when his will was read, it was found she had been left sole guardian of his daughter.

Madame was not much changed outwardly, beyond, perhaps, being if anything

a little more imperious in her manner. She wore very deep black, and no longer seemed to care about receiving strangers. She occupied herself looking over family papers, and turning out old cabinets of long-hoarded treasures.

The keys of Esther's jealously guarded rooms were hers now ; in her undisputed possession. She had resented, no one ever guessed how much, not having been allowed to use them.

Poor Esther ! all her little valuables, her most secret belongings, her desk, her letters, a silver cross, the first lock of Lucille's hair, her mother's likeness, all were tossed about by relentless hands. Madame felt as if a kind of revenge was in her power, and she gloried in it.

For a little while things went on quietly ; then Captain Darrell arrived at the Manor, and a new era began for Lucille ; she was desired to be a great deal in her step-

mother's room, and obliged to take her meals with them, whilst Pauline was treated with evident coldness.

Poor old Pauline ! her days at the Manor were numbered.

Madame and her brother had long, mysterious consultations, and the result was only too soon revealed. Lucille had never liked Mrs. Barrington, but for Captain Darrell she showed a dislike that no effort was made to conceal ; there was something in the expression on his face that made her shrink from him with undisguised fear ; if he made any advance towards cordiality, or even sat by her, she would slip away, and, if possible, take refuge with Pauline.

Whenever this happened Captain Darrell's eyes would darken, and a smile of doubtful meaning come across his lips.

One day Pauline received a message that

Madame wished to see her, and Pauline went.

Something whispered to her that the sword of Damocles, so long suspended, was about to fall.

She put on a clean cap, pinned a gold pin into the crossed lappet, and followed the messenger to Madame's room.

Madame received her very politely. She had sent for her, she explained, to tell her what she must have expected to hear, that now Lucille has grown up, her services were no longer required. She would be well recompensed for her long care of Miss Barrington, and be at liberty, Madame added, to return to France.

For a moment Pauline's dislike of Madame, and her true sense of injustice, made her almost unable to refrain her tongue. Hot, passionately angry words sprang to her white lips; then Lucille, in her helplessness, with only Madame and

her brother to call her friends, rose before her, and tears came instead.

She entreated, she implored Mrs. Barington to let her remain. She did not care for wages—that was nothing; she need no longer be called Lucille's maid. She would wait on Madame, do anything about the house, mend the linen, iron fine lace—anything—only let her be so that she might sometimes see her child. She had never been parted from her since her birth; she had been with her mother when she was born—to separate them now would utterly break her heart.

Madame listened unmoved. The verdict given was unalterable. The more old Pauline raved, the greater necessity did she see for her removal. She had plans for the future which Pauline's presence might frustrate; Pauline had friends in the village. Pauline was a power on the wrong side—the possible obstacle to hinder the success

of a future scheme—a woman to be feared and to be got rid of.

Pauline's love for Lucille was so great that she would not let her guess she was going to leave her. All her little preparations were made, her tears shed, in secret.

Lucille would look into her face with a perplexed expression on her own, and in her great dark eyes. She seemed to know by intuition that all was not right—that a crisis was approaching. Pauline would try to smile, but Lucille could not respond; she clung to the old woman, and followed her about.

The separation came at last. It was early one morning, and Pauline thought to wish good-bye whilst Lucille still slept. She crept into her room to look her last on the face she had loved so dearly. It was autumn, and the sun had only just risen. Softly, and with shaking hands, she

drew the curtains gently aside, a gleam of light fell on Lucille's face and woke her.

She understood at once that Pauline was going to leave her. Pauline had changed her dress, and wore her linsey gown; the gay little red shawl was replaced by something large and warm, and her long gold earrings were in her ears.

With a startled cry, Lucille sprang up and flung her arms about the old French-woman.

Hot tears ran down Pauline's withered, yellow cheeks; Lucille had been for years as a child to her, and it was like death to leave her.

Madame guessed perhaps how things might be. She was up and dressed; she came gliding into Lucille's room; she took Pauline by the arm and led her out.

A blaze of angry light sprang into Lucille's eyes. She tried to follow, but




Madame firmly put her back, and closed and locked the door.

Poor, faithful old Pauline. They took her to Southampton, and there put her on board a boat to Havre. They would not let her go alone, for fear she might return. A servant of Captain Darrell's accompanied her all the way.

From Havre they went a long inland journey of many miles to Flers, and then three miles beyond. It was the little village where Pauline had been born and used to live.

Nothing was altered. The deep-toned bell of the little church of St. Sauveur, that used to slowly chime the quarters and then the hour, chimed them still. Down the straggling village street, with its rough, round stones, came the children's clattering feet in home-made sabots as they ran from school.

Those who were younger still crouched



down beside their mothers, and ate their steaming cabbage broth, with hunches of black bread, out of little wooden bowls. The women, all wearing caps like old Pauline's, sat in their open doorways, and spun their flax, just as they had used to do when Pauline was herself a girl, but the faces were strange to her now. The old were dead, the young had taken their places ; and Pauline, she, too, was old, and her heart was broken.



## CHAPTER XIX.

**L**UCILLE was not easy to manage after Pauline had left. A new side of her character seemed developed by her sense of being wronged. Her eyes would blaze with passion. She had fits of rage, and would stamp her foot if anyone came near her. She refused to eat or leave her room, but sat, her face buried in her hands, the low moaning cry coming constantly from her lips.

Madame was patient, but inexorable. The power was so completely on her side that submission was only a question of time, and she could afford to wait.

She did not want the outside world to talk. She had begun Lucille's education herself, she explained, and had thought it

best to send away the old Frenchwoman, whose influence was not of the most desirable kind.

The Vicar and his wife told her she had done her duty. A papist was capable of any treachery.

By degrees the light of open rebellion died out of Lucille's eyes, and a hunted look came instead. She no longer wandered about gathering flowers. She never touched her embroidery, but sat all day with an air of profound melancholy, of utter listlessness, from which it seemed impossible to rouse her.

Madame and Captain Darrell appeared to have a great deal of business to settle, and Captain Darrell showed no intention of leaving Rozelle. If Madame took Lucille out driving, he went also. He joined her when, under the charge of Mrs. Fletcher, a strict duenna engaged by Mrs. Barrington to take Pauline's place, she was obliged to

go out walking. He taught her to ride a pony, which he led by a bridle rein. Still, her aversion to him never seemed to lessen, whilst her fear increased. They went sometimes beyond the park and through the village, and people said how kind and patient he was to her, and what a blessing it was she had some friends.

Mrs. Barrington, after much deliberation, had determined on a plan of action, by which she and her brother might still keep Rozelle Manor in their own hands.

When Lucille came of age, the power would be gone; and if Lucille died, a distant cousin of the Barringtons inherited the property, leaving Madame only her widow's jointure. If her son had lived, everything would have been different; as it was, the Manor could only be depended upon as a temporary home.

Captain Darrell was not averse to

Madame's new idea, which was that of his marriage to Lucille. He had left the army; he had little or no money, and to be master of Rozelle was a tempting bait, though weighted by a deaf and dumb wife. Madame was fond of her brother. Virtually she would be the mistress, and rule his house. If Lucille's consent could not be gained, the marriage must take place without it.

Lucille had no friends. Whatever people were inclined to think, Madame laid her plans skilfully. She let Lucille be seen a great deal with her brother. She spoke of his kindness to her; the influence he had over her; her affection for him. She invited no guests to the Manor, on the plea of mourning. She paid no visits that she could avoid.

The question was whether the wedding could take place at Rozelle; and it was eventually decided not. Lucille had lately

shown a will that might prove dangerous. If she could communicate with any one she knew, there was no knowing the result. They must go abroad ; there every difficulty might be smoothed away.

Madame, with great discretion, explained her intention of taking Lucille away, and gave as a reason that she needed change of air.

Lucille, she said, had wonderfully improved ; and travel, it had been decided, would now further help to expand her mind.

No one interfered. No one had the right. Lucille was not consulted ; she simply had to obey.

How it was all managed no one ever knew.

What threats, what intimidations were used remained a secret ; but Madame was victorious.

After a year's absence from Rozelle,

Lucille returned to it as Captain Darrell's wife.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Manor was no longer shut up as it had been. People were invited to the house, but those who had visited the Barringtons did not care to go there now that Captain Darrell was the master. For all its fair seeming, there was something underhand, they thought, about the marriage. He had his friends; but they were a wilder, noisier set than had ever before been guests at Rozelle.

Lucille was seldom seen. The unhappy heiress of so much wealth was little else than a prisoner. She was delicate, Mrs. Barrington explained, and all excitement was strictly forbidden.

Madame was mistress of the house, the real guardian of Lucille. Everything she could desire was secured for years. Lucille, when she went away, had still some



spirit left. It was all gone when they brought her home. The pathetic expression in her wonderful dark eyes had deepened, and she was as timid and frightened as a child.

Mrs. Fletcher, the same woman who had been away with Lucille as her attendant, returned with her, and her power over her was allowed to be unlimited. At first, if Lucille showed the least sign of disobedience to her wishes, she would call Captain Darrell. After doing this a few times, the smallest intimation that she was about to fetch him, and Lucille would come down before her in abject submission.

It was strange anyone could be hard enough not to be touched by Lucille's youth, her childish beauty, the sweet, beseeching eyes, but there was no one now, since old Pauline was gone, to clasp her in their arms. Mrs. Fletcher was instructed in her duties, and she performed

them with fidelity, in return for good wages. She had no sympathies.

Weeks and months went by; Madame never left Rozelle; Captain Darrell often did, and when he returned he usually brought friends with him, and festivities would begin again; entertainments from which the neighbourhood held more and more aloof. The long reign of the Barringtons made them resent a stranger being in possession of the family estate; and Captain Darrell, with the suspicion attached to him of having Creole blood, was not the kind of man to win his way.

At last an event happened which confirmed his right upon the property, and gave him altogether a new position; another heir was born; Lucille was the mother of a little son.

It was winter, snow and frost lay thick upon the ground. Cold bleak winds sighed round the Manor House, and down the tall,

wide chimneys with a dismal, moaning noise.

Lucille heard nothing; clasping her infant in her arms, life was once more beautiful to her; there was only one shadow, one fear; they would take the child away from her.

She had seen her little brother go, and Pauline. Even when they took him from her arms to dress him, a perfect agony would fill her mind, and her eyes would follow him with mute entreaty; an expression in them you see in animals when you rob them of their young. When they gave him back, a wave of sunlight seemed to fall upon her face.

Every instinct of her nature was bound up in her child.

Things were going very prosperously for Mrs. Barrington and Captain Darrell. Rozelle Manor was theirs now beyond dispute; and disagreeable remarks were

silenced. Lucille was hardly considered as a drawback. She was simply of no importance except that she was the mother of the heir. She wanted nothing but to be allowed to have her child, and this absorbing love was but another power, discreetly used, by which to rule her more completely.

Once it happened that Lucille would not give her child to Mrs. Fletcher when she went to take him, and Mrs. Fletcher fetched Captain Darrell. Lucille was clasping her baby tightly in her arms, a defiant light shining in her eyes.

Captain Darrell paused a moment in the open doorway, then slowly and steadily, with his eyes fixed upon her, he advanced towards Lucille. There was an expression on his face that made her tremble. A little cry of terror came from her lips, as he took the infant from her. In an agony she clasped her hands and sank upon her knees.

She thought, as she was always thinking, they meant to take him from her—to take him quite away; she knew not where.

Captain Darrell gave his son very quietly to Mrs. Fletcher, turned away, and left the room.

Mrs. Fletcher received him with a grim smile of satisfaction. The little drama was played out. Lucille was conquered. She no longer dared dispute the nurse's will. She was powerless to assert her rights, for she understood that she was to be allowed to have none.

Christmas came and went. Captain Darrell left the Manor, and Madame as usual remained in charge. Lucille was still kept in her own room, which was in the French wing of the building. She was not strong; her face was more delicate, more spiritual, and the expression had altered, as the expression does on all mothers' faces.

When Mrs. Fletcher was busy and let her

have her baby, she would sit for hours in a high-backed chair, rocking it in her arms, trying to speak to him, making a little murmuring noise that took the place of words. And yet she was not farther off from communion with her child than the dumb animals are, and the same divine instinct made him cling to her, and wail when he was taken from her ; or lay his little head upon her breast to sleep.



## CHAPTER XX.

**J**ANUARY came in with a heavy fall of snow. It was an unusually severe winter. Captain Darrell did not return home till the middle of the month, and then Lucille's child was christened. It was taken quietly to the church and received the name of George Barrington.

Lucille was not allowed to go. They thought they had kept everything so quiet, she would not know; but in a vague way she guessed something unusual was going on—something was about to happen.

Her suite of rooms opened one into another, the bed room being the last. The room next hers was the sitting-room, the farthest was the nursery. Mrs. Fletcher every morning took the child and dressed it

in the nursery, and when Lucille was ready, she joined her there. On the morning of the christening the door of the nursery was locked—the communication cut off.

Lucille's face grew white with fear. It had come at last, the end she had been always dreading—they had robbed her of her child.

She tried to unfasten the door ; she flew to the bell and rang it ; she fell upon her knees by the side of the quaint old carved bed, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Then she returned to the sitting-room and once more wildly shook the handle of the door.

It was like a wave of the sea beating upon a rock. Lucille was helpless and powerless. She crept to the window, the old moaning cry coming from her lips, and looked out.

Nothing was to be seen but the terrace



and the mere ; the terrace white with snow ; the mere, a sheet of dark, half-frozen water.

She sank down upon the window sill, covering her face with her hands, and it was there they found her on their return from church. They thought at first she was asleep, but she had fainted.

She was a poor thing, Mrs. Fletcher said, as she laid her on the bed ; but she put the child beside her.

That night the christening was celebrated by a grand dinner. It was not possible to have a *fête* in the park, such as had been given by Madame when her son was christened ; nor was it easy to get many people who had visited the Barringtons to come to an entertainment given by Captain Darrell. Still, as his marriage to Lucille was proved, and as his child had been born and christened at Rozelle, a large, though somewhat mixed gathering was the

result of the many invitations sent out by Madame.

It was a bitterly cold night: the north-east wind came in angry gusts, and shook the iron clampings of the long French windows. The dinner was served in the great hall in the old part of the Manor, far away from Lucille's side of the house. Lucille sat once again in the high-backed chair in the nursery, rocking her child. The firelight sent a deep red glow into the room, and the lights from the sitting-room beyond were reflected back upon the high oak mantelpiece, with its delicate carvings, and on the polished inlaid floor.

Mrs. Fletcher was busying herself at a great French bureau, and though Lucille seemed intent upon her child, her eyes were following her all the time. She still felt some evil was impending; the mysterious disappearance of the morning was working in her mind.

Mrs. Fletcher took out of a drawer an infant's delicate lace robe. She lighted a lamp and examined it carefully, holding it up, and turning it over; then she put it down, and went back to the press, bringing out this time a satin petticoat and sleeve ribbons. When these also had been thoroughly inspected, she went over to Lucille, and took the child from her.

For a moment Lucille's arms tightened round him, then she let him go.

Mrs. Fletcher sat down in a chair nearly opposite to her, took off the infant's little bed-gown, put on the lace robe in its place, and tied up the sleeves with knots of ribbon. When the process of dressing was finished—and it took some time—she folded a delicate cashmere round the little heir, and carried him out of the room.

A French timepiece chimed the hour of nine, and he was ordered to be brought to

the dining-hall, to be presented to his father's guests.

The old banqueting hall was blazing with light; delicate glass and the family plate glittered on the table, among stands of hot-house flowers. The wine was being freely passed, and the talking and laughter somewhat excited and hilarious.

The arrival of the young heir caused a hush in the conversation. He was handed round; speeches were made, and his health drank. A new name was now, they said, incorporated with that of Barrington, and long might the Darrells continue owners of Rozelle.

Madame had not left the table. She was seated at the head of it, dressed in velvet and the family diamonds, which of right belonged to Lucille. Captain Darrell sat opposite to her, his dark face flushed with triumph. Portraits of the Barringtons hung thick upon the walls; the plates

off which they had eaten, the very chairs on which they sat, had once been theirs ; but now they were dead and gone, and everything was his. It was a proud moment, and he smiled a satisfied smile beneath his black moustache.

Lucille never moved from off the chair on which she was seated when Mrs. Fletcher left. She waited, with her eyes patiently fixed upon the door all the time.

Presently Mrs. Fletcher returned. She was in great good humour. She had enjoyed the prestige of her position, and some golden souvenirs had found their way into her hand. She took off the dainty lace robe, and redressed the child in his little nightdress, and laid him back on Lucille's lap.

She did not remark the strange, unusual fire that was burning in her eyes.

There were revelries that night in the

servants' hall, as well as in the dining-room. The night was so cold and dark, and the snow came down so thickly, that there were grave doubts if many of those who had driven to Rozelle would be able to get away at all; so the coachmen and grooms were making merry with a prospect of being left undisturbed.

Mrs. Fletcher had been requested to join the supper party, and the temptation to do so was overpoweringly strong. Madame's orders about Lucille never being left alone with the child were very strict; but no one knew better than Mrs. Fletcher how carefully and tenderly Lucille looked after her baby; how entirely she was to be trusted.

Lucille was now apparently absorbed with the care of him, rocking him gently to sleep in her arms; and so she would remain doing, as Mrs Fletcher argued, no matter how long she was away.

Not that she intended to be long. She would just slip down, have a bit of supper, and return directly. For some time she still hesitated, then having at last made up her mind to go, she went quietly out of the room, closing the door behind her.

No sooner was she gone than Lucille started up. That new, strange light was still burning in her eyes, and her hands were trembling with excitement. She went across to her own room, took a little cloak which was thrown upon the bed, and folded it round her child. Every now and then she paused, as though she were listening, her eyes, dilated and with the wild, haunted expression in them, turned upon the door. She had half taken up a shawl, as if about to put it over her own shoulders, but she let it fall again.

She raised one of her white, trembling hands to her head, and put back her hair,

as though she were trying to steady her brain, to concentrate her thoughts, to fix her mind on some plan of action.

Then she started, she fancied she saw Captain Darrell. His face perpetually haunted her; she always thought he was coming to take her child from her; she clasped him more tightly in her arms, ran to the door, opened it, and went swiftly out into the passage.

All was silent; a dim lamp was burning against the wall, and by its light she crept cautiously on till she came to a narrow staircase which communicated with a side door, opening on to the French garden; none of the usual locking up had yet been done; it was an exceptional night.

Lucille opened the door, and stepped outside.

• It was not snowing now, and the moon was shining, though dark, flying banks of clouds were busy driving across its surface;



a bitter wind was blowing, and all the ground was white.

“Where was she to go for safety? To what secure refuge could she fly? She had no Pauline, no friends, and she must save her child.”

The beech wood flashed upon her mind; she would go there first, at all events; for she could not remain near the house; the crowning fear of her life was that her husband meant to take away her child; her intention was to hide him.

She went on quickly; she knew the way so well she never hesitated; every inch of the ground was familiar to her, no matter how thickly the snow was lying on it.

She ran out of the garden and crossed the park. The wind blew upon her bare head and through her scanty dress, but she was unconscious of everything but that she was taking her child away from some unknown evil.

Just as she reached the beech wood the moon again became obscured, the snow once more began to fall.

Lucille made her way to one of the trees under which she and old Pauline had used to sit in the happy summer days, when Pauline had knitted as she sang her little Norman songs, whilst Lucille gathered flowers.

Lucille reached the tree at last, and leant against it, her frightened eyes straining into the darkness.

Presently her child began to cry. She could not hear its voice but she felt it tremble. She sat down upon the ground, with her back against the trunk of the tree, and tenderly laid her infant on her breast.

It no longer seemed cold or dark. The bitter wind did not hurt her. She was alone with her child, and she was happy. It seemed to her the sun was shining, that

the birds were flying among the branches of the trees, that all around her, filling the air with their soft fragrance, lovely flowers were blooming.

She bent her head down over the baby, and kissed him gently. He was all hers now. The great revelation was at hand ; a smile was on her lips, a look of rapture on her face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Fletcher remained downstairs longer than she had intended. The party in the servants' hall had been a very merry one, and time had slipped by almost unconsciously. The howling of the north-east wind outside, as it blew in fitful gusts round the Manor, made the warmth and brightness inside seem more attractive. The servants had drawn their chairs round the blazing fire, sang songs and told stories ; no one heeded how the hours passed till the great clock struck twelve.

Mrs. Fletcher started up. She only feared Madame might have discovered her absence. She had no doubts about Lucille. She wished good-night, and went hastily upstairs. She half expected to find Lucille sitting in her high-backed chair rocking her baby ; but her absence did not surprise her. Doubtless she had taken him to bed.

She raked the fire together, but found it had gone quite out ; not a spark remained. The lamp also had burnt dim ; she trimmed it, and carrying it in her hand went quietly through the sitting-room into the bed-room.

The great carved four-post French bedstead, with its quaintly ornamented head and foot board, looked weird and dark in the uncertain light.

She held the lamp down, shading it with her hand, expecting the light to fall upon Lucille's face.

The bed had not been slept in, and Mrs. Fletcher turned pale. She no longer made

her search slowly; she hurried round the room peering into and under everything—a horrible conviction all the while gaining ground that Lucille was gone.

There was no sound to be heard except the wind as it shook the iron fastenings of the windows—no child's cry—utter silence.

She went out into the passage, then came back again into the rooms. Her hands shook so she could scarcely hold the lamp.

Something must be done. Search must be made, and, most awful of all, Madame must be told.

Mrs. Fletcher went down again to the servants' hall. They were still making merry, and there was much noisy laughter. She sent a message to Madame's maid, who quickly came out. The story was soon whispered, and they went upstairs together. They searched all the rooms along the corridor, all the probable places where

Lucille might possibly have hidden herself, but the result was utter failure.

Mrs. Fletcher sat down upon a chair, the great drops of perspiration gathering on her forehead.

Who would tell Madame? and that the time had come when both Mrs. Barrington and Captain Darrell must be informed forced itself on both the women.

The hands of the French timepiece pointed to one o'clock.

Mrs. Fletcher got up and resolutely went downstairs. Madame was spending the evening in the large drawing-room, and from there soft strains of music were heard, mingled with the sounds of merriment. Captain Darrell was still wearing the expression of triumphant satisfaction. Madame looked tired; but the lines on her face had softened, and a gracious smile was on her lips. No warning voice whispered to either of them how soon their reign

at Rozelle Manor was destined to be ended.

Madame caught sight of Fletcher's white face, and the colour faded from her own. She made her excuses to one or two people standing by her, then went out into the hall. She was a woman of great presence of mind. She saw something of what Fletcher had to disclose stamped on her guilty, white face; but she would not alarm her brother yet. She took Mrs. Fletcher into a little morning room, where they were not likely to be interrupted, and listened quietly whilst she told her story; then they also went upstairs together.

Madame made the same search Fletcher had already done, and with the same result.

The news could not any longer be hidden. It was whispered through the house that Mrs. Darrell and her child were missing, and a perfect panic soon prevailed.

Captain Darrell, with his teeth closely set, searched high and low. In losing Lucille and his heir he was losing everything ; money, power, Rozelle ; and the expression on his face did not augur well for Lucille's future, should he find her.

When the search inside the Manor was considered hopeless, they went outside. All trace of the moon was gone now, and the darkness was intense. Lamps were hastily taken from the different carriages ; the men servants, gathered from out of the comfortable hall, went up and down the terraces, the poplar avenue, and out into the high road. They sent to the village, to the station, to all the probable places ; but no sign, no trace could be found. No one had heard or seen either the mother or the child.

Lucille had not drowned herself, that was certain, for the mere was frozen over. No one dreamt of the beech wood, and the



freshly fallen snow had filled up the marks left by her little slippered feet.

\* \* \* \* \*

The day broke at last. The north-east wind was hushed. The sun rose, and the glow of its coming splendour threw a faint pink flush which spread all over the vast expanse of glittering white. The dark clouds rolled away before it, a new morning had begun.

Rays of sunshine fell on the tops of the beech wood trees; everything was wakening to life.

A boy had laid a trap to catch some birds. He went cautiously towards the clump of beech trees, over the ridges of drifted snow, whistling a merry air.

Some unusual object attracted his attention. After going close to it, and peeping curiously, he ran down to the Manor House with bated breath and a livid face. He could hardly speak, so as to make himself

understood, but he pointed to the little dark wood on the brow of the hill.

Captain Darrell hastened to the spot, followed by a little eager crowd. The rays of sunshine had penetrated now through the leafless branches of the beech trees—and one rested on Lucille.

She still clasped her dead infant in her arms. Her head was bent, but there was an expression of rapture on her face—a smile upon her pale, cold lips.

The child's head had partly fallen back. It had been crying, and the tears were frozen on its little marble cheeks.

*It was the sleep of sorrow, and the dream of joy.*

THE END.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.





